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CARTOON AND COMIC ART STUDIES

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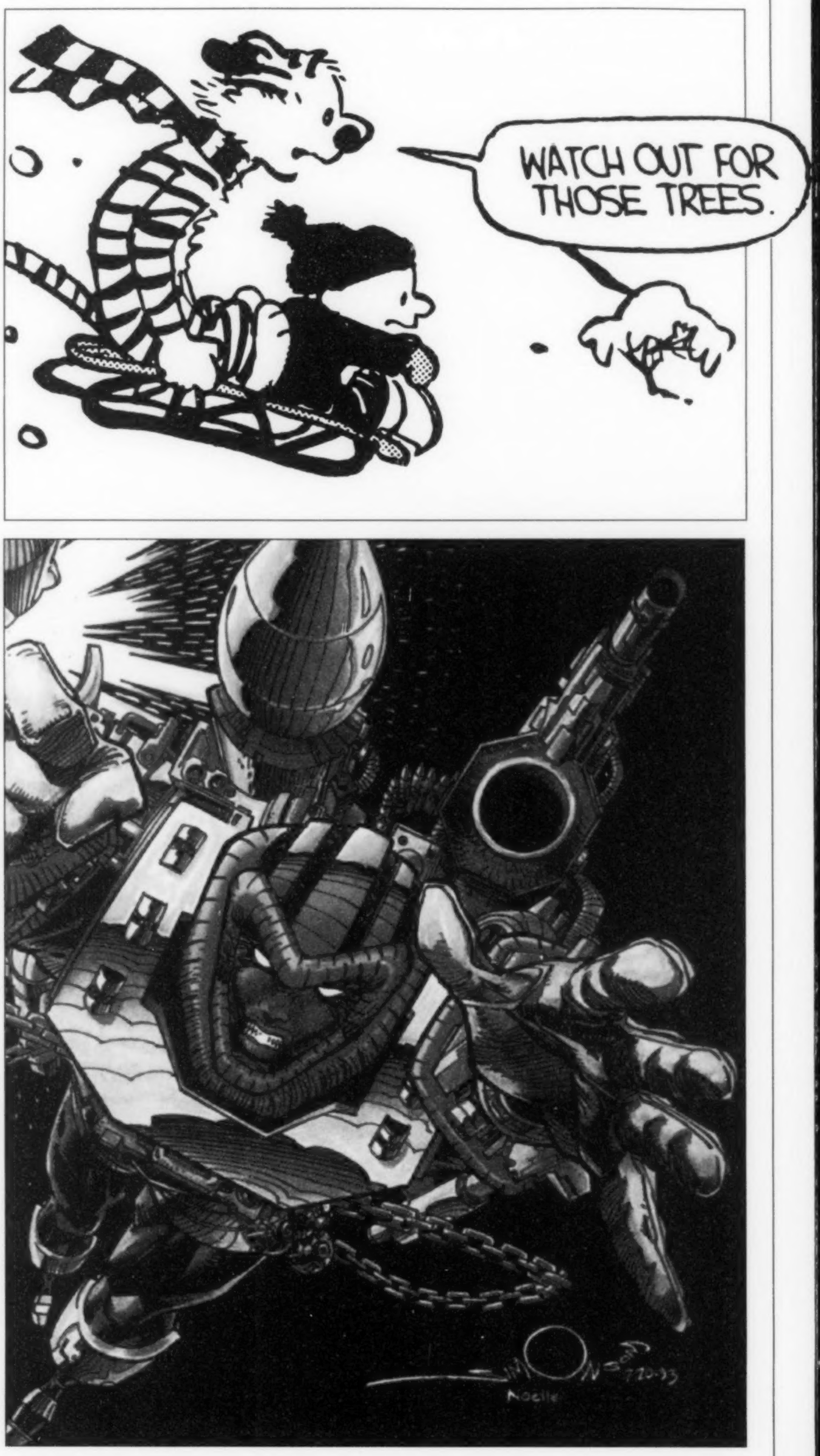

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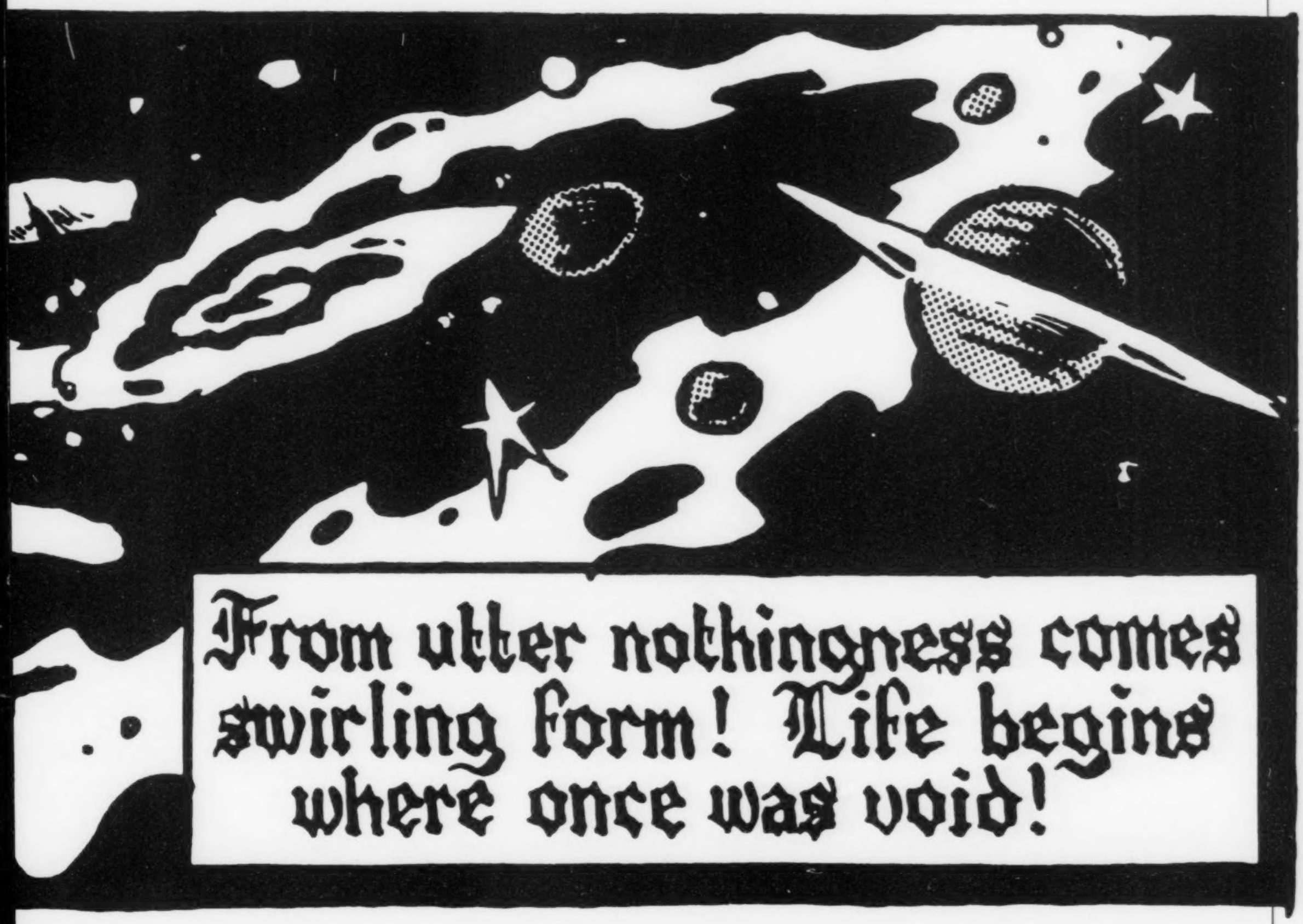
A Call from
Tigers, Monsters, a
Fantasies in *Calvin*

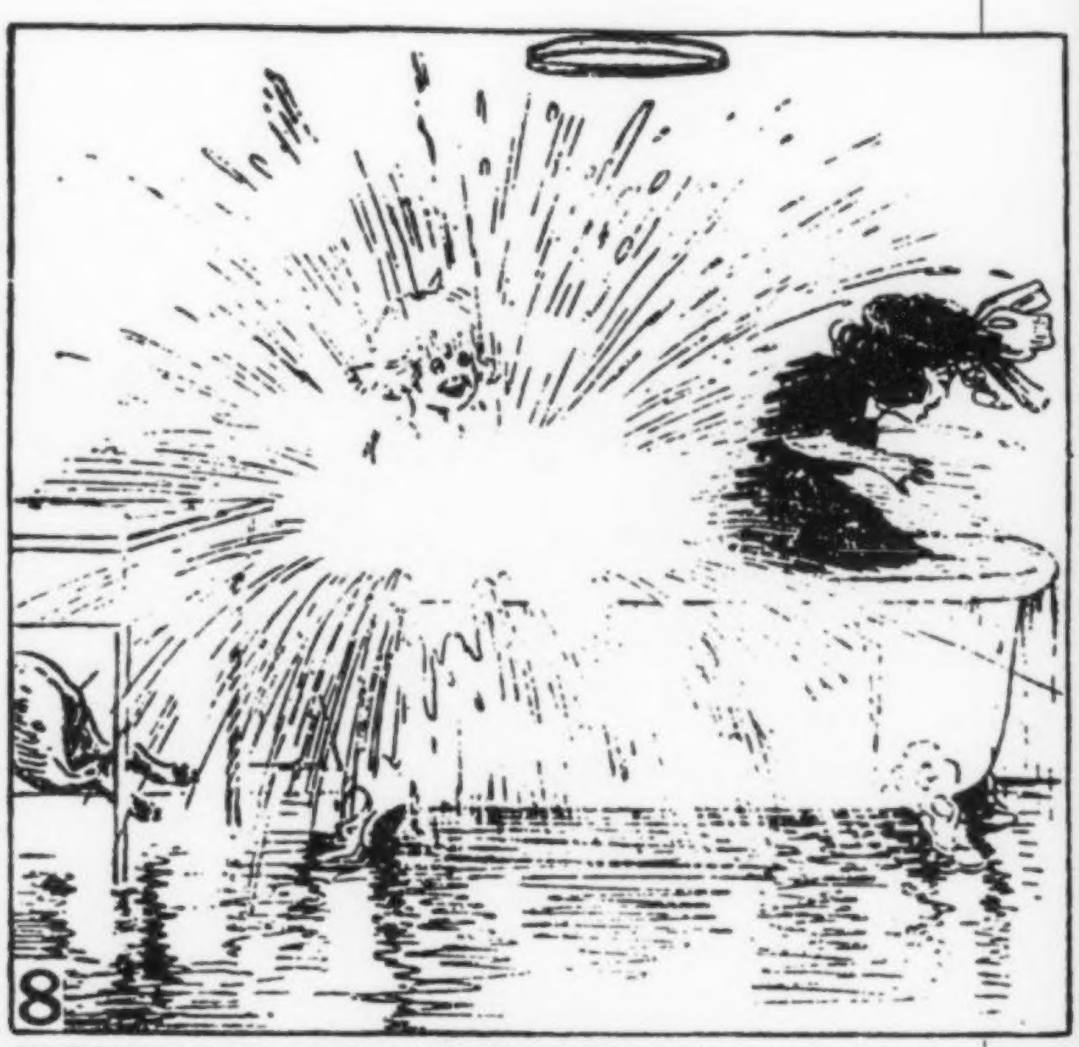
BY JAMES E. CARON

Comics have always been associated with children, starting with the Yellow Kid, and comic strips which feature children have always been among the most popular. One of the most popular recent comic strips to highlight children is *Calvin and Hobbes*, which recently ended. Using as counterpoints other well-known current strips featuring children—*The Family Circus*, *Peanuts*, and *Dennis the Menace*—as well as two older comic strips which featured children, *Buster Brown* and *The Katzenjammer Kids*, this essay examines how *Calvin and Hobbes* represents children.[1] A set of opposing ideas about the nature of children provides a beginning for analysis. One idea claims that children are naturally good. An exemplary representation of this positive view is the virtual angel of William Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" (1807), who comes into this world trailing clouds of heavenly glory.[2] The second idea about children claims that they are naturally bad. In American culture, this negative view can be traced back to the Calvinist theology of the Puritans: to be in a state of nature was to be in a state of original sin.[3]

the Wild
nd Other Beastly
and Hobbes

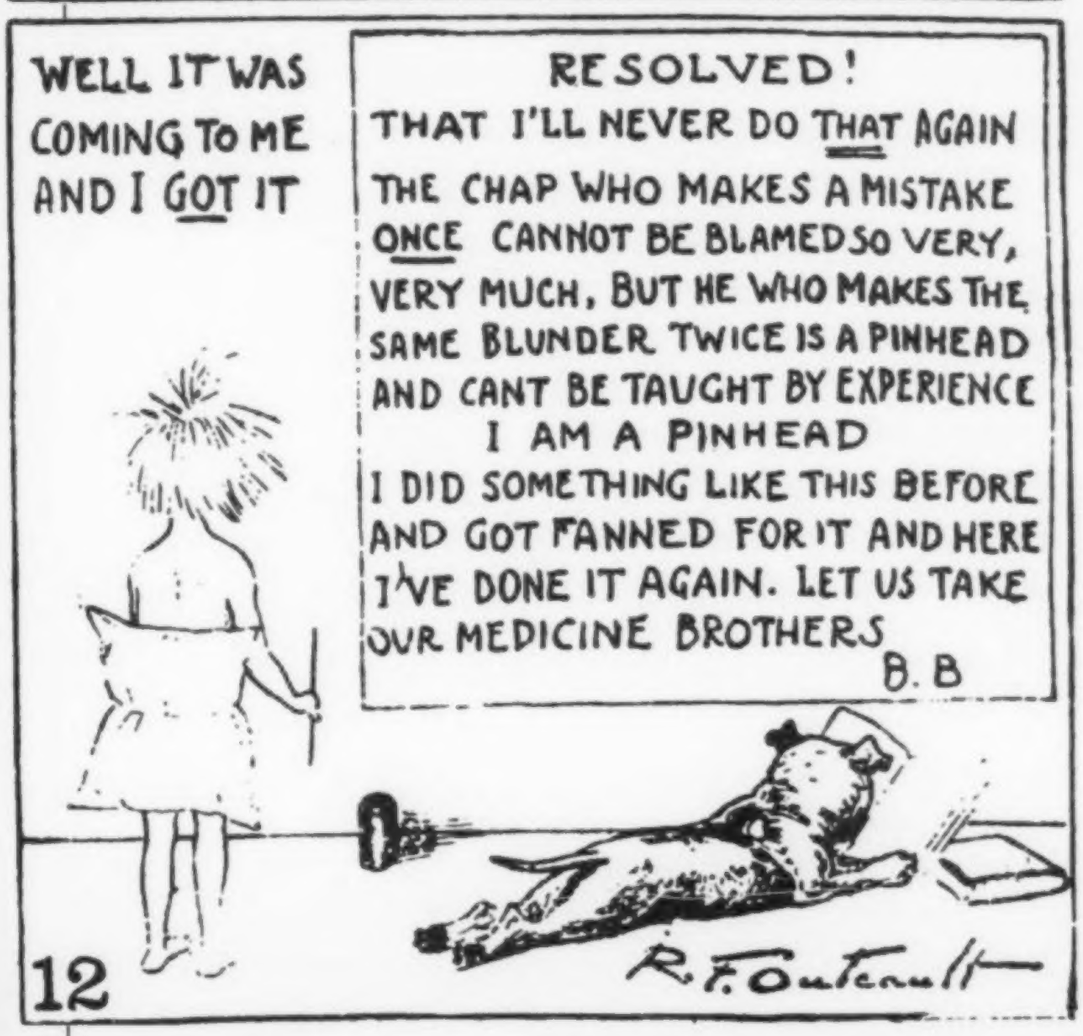


This negative view of humanity as expressed by John Calvin in some measure informs Bill Watterson's conception of *Calvin and Hobbes*. Though Watterson is not interested in behavior as sin, his depiction of Calvin explores how the apparently natural behavior of children is perceived by the adult world not only as socially correct or incorrect but also as good or bad in a moral sense. The representation of Calvin in some ways comically reinvents the child found in John Calvin's theology as it pokes fun at the child found in Wordsworth's ode. Watterson thus serves up for contemplation by contemporary society a boy whose behavior places him somewhere between the polarities of strict protestantism and idealistic romanticism. This essay will emphasize the darker side of Calvin's behavior by focussing on the tropes "beast" and "monster" as they are used to represent people in a "state of nature." A corollary of John Calvin's description of the nature of people declares that the natural world is fundamentally brutal in the sense that all creatures are ruled by appetite, an idea expounded in the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes. Thus as Calvin humorously evokes John Calvin's view of people, his



HI, DAD. IT'S ME, CALVIN!
HOW'S WORK GOING? ...UH HUH... PRETTY DAY OUT, ISN'T IT? ... YEP.....
ARE YOU BRINGING ME HOME ANY PRESENTS TONIGHT? ... NO? WELL, JUST THOUGHT I'D ASK...
LISTEN, I SUPPOSE YOU'RE WONDERING WHY I CALLED...

"WANNA SEE A PRETTY WATERFALL?"


WELL IT WAS COMING TO ME AND I GOT IT
RESOLVED!
THAT I'LL NEVER DO THAT AGAIN
THE CHAP WHO MAKES A MISTAKE ONCE CANNOT BE BLAMED SO VERY, VERY MUCH. BUT HE WHO MAKES THE SAME BLUNDER TWICE IS A PINHEAD AND CANT BE TAUGHT BY EXPERIENCE
I AM A PINHEAD
I DID SOMETHING LIKE THIS BEFORE AND GOT FANNED FOR IT AND HERE I'VE DONE IT AGAIN. LET US TAKE OUR MEDICINE BROTHERS
B. B
R. F. Outcault
12

Water volume as a metaphor for mischief: *Dennis the Menace* ® used by permission of Hank Ketcham and © by North America Syndicate; *Calvin and Hobbes* © Watterson. Dist. by Universal Press Syndicate. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved

stuffed tiger Hobbes at times suggests a comic strip version of natural behavior in the world according to Thomas Hobbes.[4]

If Wordsworth's image of the child as an angel seems simply sentimental, a mocking version of that image is the cliche that sleeping children are always angels. Calvin, however, is an angel only when he is sleeping, for he clearly acts like a demon during waking hours. More precisely, Calvin acts like a little monster, an epithet Rosalyn the baby sitter uses explicitly and one that his parents would no doubt find fitting. Calvin in his fantasy life frequently agrees with this assessment. Thus he pretends to be a giant, a giant amoeba, a zombie, a werewolf, a generic prehistoric monster, Godzilla, a generic dinosaur, a pterodactyl, a pteranodon, and, his favorite—a tyrannosaurus rex—which he imagines several times, once even literally biting his mother on the leg. Indeed, even when he pretends to be ordinary animals, such as an eagle, octopus, crocodile, or shark, all exhibit predatory behavior, like the monsters. In the same vein, Calvin expresses disappointment when his dad tells him that zoo keepers do not throw people to the alligators. Most of these beast fantasies occur in the earliest cartoons, collected in *Calvin and Hobbes* (1987), which suggests that the expression "Calvin is a little monster" was a principal way that Watterson, at least initially, envisioned his creation.[5]

To underscore the degree to which the trope of "monster" organizes *Calvin and Hobbes*, consider two other little boys from famous comic strips, Buster Brown and Dennis the Menace. All portrayals of rambunctious little boys include general mischief, disobedience, and overt expressions of destructive aggression of course. In this, Buster, Dennis, and Calvin are very similar. Thus Buster puts tacks on grouchy grandpa's chair, repaints a portrait so it looks like George Washington, and floods the bathroom so he and Mary Jane can swim. Dennis uses a hammer on the salesman's proverbial foot in the door, breaks a window at a birthday party, and floods the bathroom to create a "pretty waterfall." Calvin puts nails in the coffee table, pries up his bedroom floorboards to create a secret passageway, and floods the entire house. Although the examples cited represent an extreme of their mischievous ways, Buster, Dennis, and Calvin each have dire reputations that encompass their respective neighborhoods.

Despite the three boys' similar capacities for wanton mayhem, a hint of Calvin's monstrous difference may be found in the representation of a situation they all have in common, playing with water faucets in the house.[6] The mildest version may involve Dennis. Not only does the single panel format limit portrayal of damage, but Ketcham decides not to present anything directly, leaving the state of the bathroom to the readers' imagination. With Buster, Outcault shows the amount of water released, which covers the floor enough to cause Buster's mother to raise her skirts but not enough to threaten her shoes. A reader might imagine the "pretty waterfall" to have wreaked more damage than Buster and Mary Jane's swimming expedition by the time Dennis tells his dad; in either case, however, a realistic appraisal of the aftermath would probably note the water damage as localized. With Calvin, the situation is quite different. Watterson chooses to dispense entirely with a notion of localized damage, showing Calvin standing on the top of a stepladder in the middle of a flooded room with only the top of a lamp visible. The wrench in Calvin's hand suggests he has completely disabled a faucet and created a steady stream of maximum force. Although that detail provides a plausible explanation for the five feet of water that is apparently everywhere in the house, the fantastic volume of liquid in effect represents Calvin's monstrous capacity for mischief.

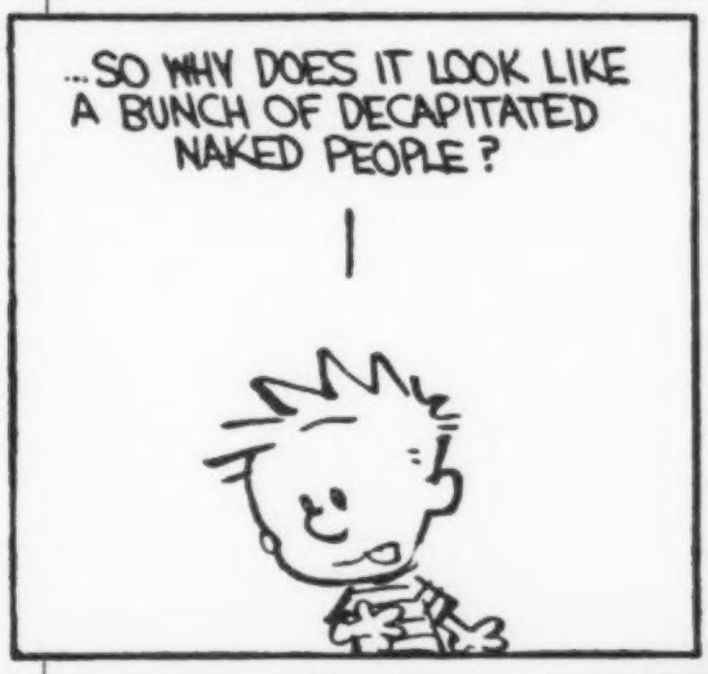
Only Rudolph Dirks's Hans and Fritz in *The Katzenjammer Kids* top that capacity. Their antics at times place others in what would be life-threatening situations if taken seriously. For example, Hans and Fritz, trapped at the North Pole with Mama on the Captain's ship, thwart the relief effort of the Captain and one of his sailors by stealing their tent, dog sled, and clothes when the two men are sleeping. The trick forces the men to walk back to the ship, through a blizzard, in their socks. The boys are clearly aware of the dangerous situation they have created, for, as they leave the two men sleeping on the ice, Hans says, "I hope some polar bear don't see dem snoozers sleeping dere!"[7] Despite all his mischief, Calvin never puts anyone in harm's way, and Dirks's willingness to portray such sadism is a function of his strip's one-dimensional nature. Its whole existence was predicated upon endless varieties of havoc created by Hans and Fritz.

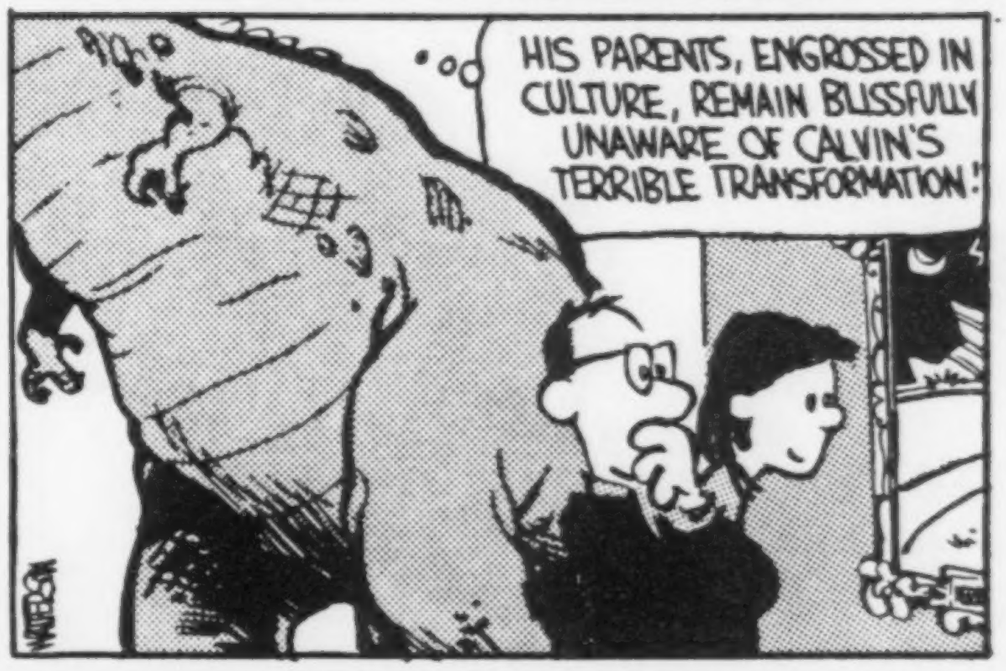
Nevertheless, what links *The Katzenjammer Kids* to *Calvin and Hobbes* is the demonic delight Hans, Fritz, and Calvin take in their havoc-making, an intensity of pleasure clearly beyond *Dennis the Menace* and *Buster Brown*. In another strip set at the North Pole, Hans and Fritz take a polar bear cub

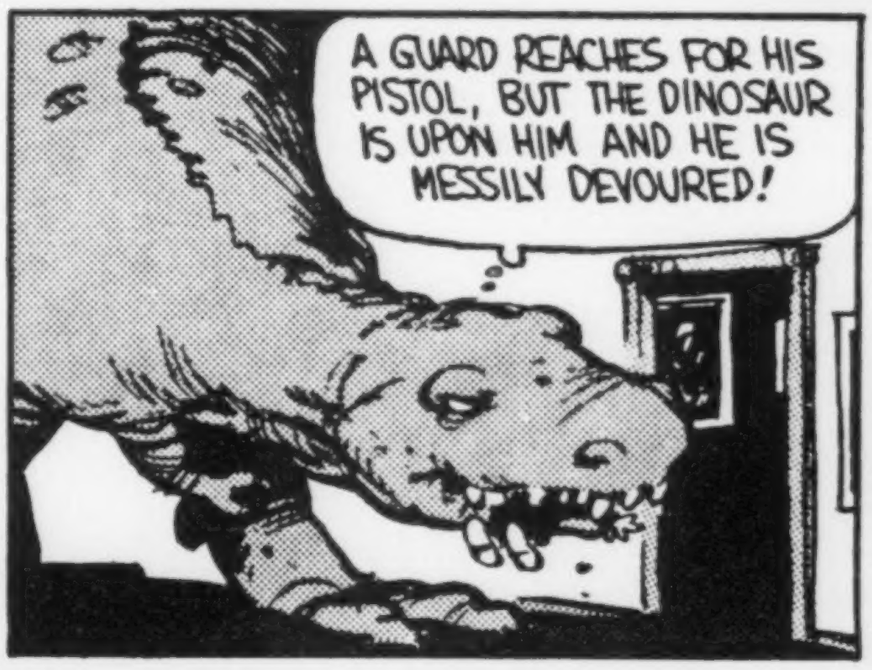
Calvin's demonic grin: *Calvin and Hobbes* © Watterson. Dist. by Universal Press Syndicate. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.

calvin and hobbes

by WATTERSON







HUNDREDS OF PRICELESS PAINTINGS ARE RIPPED TO SHREDS IN THE AWFUL RAMPAGE! WEALTHY BENEFACTORS ARE TRAMPLED! THE MUSEUM IS IN RUINS! ON TO SYMPHONY HALL!!

I THINK WE'D BETTER GET HIM OUT OF HERE. HE HAD THAT GRIN AGAIN.
I WANNA SEE THE DINOSAURS AT THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM AGAIN.
WE SPENT ALL AFTERNOON THERE, CALVIN.

from its caged mother and give it to the Captain and some sailors. As the boys return to release the mother so that she can find the cub amongst the men (with predictable mayhem), they exchange these remarks: "Say, Fritz, it's cruel to take a baby bear from home, ain't it." "Aw naw!! Not ven it's just for fun!"[8] A thirst for their brand of fun overrides all other considerations by Hans and Fritz. Though Calvin is a more complicated character, he espouses similar ideas: "Life's a lot more fun when you're not responsible for your actions"; "There's an inverse relationship between how good something is for you, and how much fun it is." Calvin will not even bother drawing chalk pictures on the sidewalk with Susie when she tells him it is not vandalism.[9]

Calvin signals his taste for demonic behavior with a particular grin, a grin identified during one of his fantasies about becoming a tyrannosaurus rex that takes place in an art museum. Imagining himself devouring museum guards, destroying artwork, and scattering terrified patrons of the arts, Calvin smiles, prompting his father to say, "We'd better get him out of here. He had that grin again." A grin as the sign of a will to mischief evokes traditional views of laughter's connection with disorder and with the imps and devils, fools and idiots that represent it.[10] The comic can be dangerous to social order, represented here by a museum. Calvin's grin suggests that at times he represents something beyond the merely mischievous, something inimical to goodness and respectability as well as order. At such moments, Calvin comes closest to Hans and Fritz. *The Katzenjammer Kids*, more than any other strip under consideration, portrays starkly and routinely the Calvinistic idea that all children are naturally bad. *The Katzenjammer Kids*, *Buster Brown*, and *Dennis the Menace* each show an affinity for *Calvin and Hobbes* in the way the boys exhibit their delight in trickery and mischief. To varying degrees, all the boys conjure every parent's worst nightmare.

Any one of these examples moves well beyond the realm of what is arguably the most popular comic strip of all time that takes children as its central theme, *Peanuts*—even though Schulz, too, is capable of portraying the negative side of laughter.[11] In the world of Charlie Brown, however, aggression is likely to be expressed not by Charlie but Lucy. Indeed, such behavior is not gender specific in most of these strips. Little girls who are quite capable of mischief appear: Mary Jane (*Buster Brown*), Gina (*Dennis the Menace*), and Susie (*Calvin and Hobbes*). Even so, more typical in *Peanuts* than Lucy want only destroying things is Lucy verbally abusing someone or throwing a tantrum in her capacity as the world's biggest "fussbudget." Lucy is also capable of hitting others, notably Linus. Yet, as her title suggests, even her worst is not in the same league as the destruction caused by Buster, Dennis, Calvin, or Fritz and Hans.

The notable difference between Calvin and all his contemporaries as well as predecessors is Watterson's depiction of Calvin's fantasy world, for the true horror of Calvin's capacity for destruction can only be seen there.[12] And the true measure of that capacity comes not with his wishes for a chainsaw or a flamethrower, as suggestive as they are, but with the depiction of his fantasy play. Fantasy play is undoubtedly the single most distinctive feature of *Calvin and Hobbes*, starting with Hobbes and including Calvin's other alternate identities, Spaceman Spiff and Stupendous Man. The use of fantasy in all the strips mentioned thus far would itself require an essay. For now, one might note the pleasure Calvin takes in maneuvering toy cars into a crash or arranging for the destruction of an entire "city" of sand. In a Sunday version of the car-crash fantasy, the depth of aggression in Calvin's fantasies is suggested by Mr. Jones and his car becoming "millions of tiny shards." Moreover, Calvin's compulsion to repeat the fantasy with the neighbors and their mini-van is also represented. In short, fantasy play is a crucial strategy for Watterson's portrayal of Calvin as a little boy who behaves monstrously, a strategy that separates Calvin even from his nearest comic brethren.[13]

Calvin's imaginative portrayal of himself as monster is perhaps largely unconscious, and in this he would resemble his comic brethren. Yet Calvin is also aware of his beastly behavior. Indeed, he is capable of re-inventing the animal representation of it in more stark yet complicated ways, as when he fantasizes himself an unrepentant criminal about to be executed.[14] This last representation is unusually harsh for *Calvin and Hobbes*. In pointing to Calvin's view of himself, however, the image of the unrepentant criminal sums up much more than the qualities of disobedience, mischief, and minor destruction that are traits of Buster Brown and Dennis the Menace. Calvin as criminal also illustrates the degree to which Watterson has dipped his comic brush in a dark view of children, a view colored by the ideas of John Calvin and Thomas Hobbes. Insofar as children are in a "state of nature," they possess a large capacity to act against the social order—to heed a call from an inner wilderness and act like beasts or monsters.

Two major ideas associated with Romanticism are a positive view of the state of nature and the beneficial effects to be gained through contact with the natural world. Nature thus is a source of virtues

and the people who live closest to the land imbibe those virtues as a baby drinks its mother's milk. To be natural, moreover, is to be free from the artificiality that civilization breeds. This primitivism was current in the United States by the early nineteenth century, when vast tracts of the natural world remained untouched by western civilization. By the mid-nineteenth century, the Puritan view of nature could be reversed so that the purity of the virgin land was said to guarantee the purity of the people who lived on it: Man and Nature could live together in an Emersonian harmony. From these ideas a cult of wilderness was established in American culture. A contrary view nevertheless remained in effect, one holding that the crudity of the wilderness guarantees the crudity of the people who lived in it: Man and Nature live together, at best, under an uneasy truce.[15] An initial sense of how *Calvin and Hobbes* falls into the latter category can be gained with a few strips which demonstrate Calvin's interaction with specific creatures. In one, Calvin practices "worm-mucking" (stepping on worms) and in another proclaims that his "hobby" is collecting "stamped bugs," that is, bugs he has stepped on. In a third Calvin declares that flowers are "stupid" and proves his point by watering them to make them "think" it is raining, thus turning the standard benevolent action of a gardener into a cruel game in which "it's fun to mess with [flowers'] minds." Such behavior is hardly the romantic child of popular nineteenth century fiction, who was named for flowers and showed an instinctive affinity for all living creatures.[16] In Calvin's world, not only is it fun to destroy nature, but nature can be hostile too, for example, when a fish comes out of the water to bite Calvin as he is fishing.[17]

Watterson's portrayal of the relationship between people and the natural world, however, goes beyond a comic literalizing of the old question "are the fish biting?" or a simple opposition to another century's use of romantic ideas. Rather, that relationship is depicted in a profoundly ambivalent way, one that characterizes the twentieth century; it consists of an unstable compromise between acknowledging the worth of the natural world *per se* and remaining enthralled by the technology that separates people from it.[18] In another strip concerned with fishing, this time a Sunday page, Watterson illustrates the instability of the compromise. Calvin and Hobbes want to enjoy the pleasure of fishing, which Calvin describes as "surviving in the wild—pitting [their] wits against the raging elements." They want things easy, however, so they shun baiting their hooks with worms, instead throwing them into the water and planning to catch the fish with the net when they surface.[19] The worms sink and Calvin and Hobbes quit. Calvin suggests as an alternative some fast-food cheeseburgers that come in "neat little boxes," and Hobbes declares that no one should "eat something that eats worms," comically denying the reality of the food chain, a denial represented by the neatness of the boxed cheeseburgers.

When the entire family goes on its annual camping trip, a situation to which Watterson devoted a number of strips on different occasions, the modern ambivalence about the natural world forms an obvious theme. Camping, after all, embodies the modern compromise, for even the purist who hikes in remote terrain to escape as fully as possible into the pleasure of wilderness relies on the latest in lightweight, moisture-resistant gear and (probably) freeze-dried food. Calvin's family as campers offers plenty of opportunities to create laughs from the usual problems that come with trading in modern comforts for a relative exposure to the elements, everything soaked from days of rain to cameras dropped into the lake and broken eyeglasses, for instance.

Underlying these specific moments of trouble, however, is the thematic tug-of-war between the desire to heed a call from the wild and be primitive in some measure, to get back to nature because it is a good thing to do, and the desire to remain in the comfort of one's home. Humanity has struggled for thousands of years to achieve the level of comfort available to people today. Camping willfully denies that comfort and exposes an individual to those very elements against which people have struggled for so long. Camping thus possesses an inherently comic facet. Watterson portrays the competing desires by having Calvin's mother always complaining about her inability to have a cup of real coffee and Calvin's father always extolling the virtues of being outdoors. The father may go on to explain that a week of solid rain is not as important as spending time together, but the mother will claim that "any judge would take this trip as grounds for divorce." Even Calvin, who alternates between liking the novelty of camping and disliking its discomforts, rebels when nature comes too close: catching fish may be fun—but not cleaning them. All this ambivalence is nicely encapsulated when the mother contrasts a morning fishing ("a bunch of slimy fish gasping and flopping in the slop at the bottom of a boat") with a morning at home ("a decent newspaper, a fresh muffin, and a pot of real coffee"). In the last panel Calvin asks, "Why'd we ever come here then?" Mom answers, "Go ask Conan the Barbarian" while dad says, "C'mon, Calvin. I'll teach you to put a worm on a

hook."[20] Dad's positive response to the experience of camping represents a modern function for the natural world: to escape the stress of civilization, in this case his job as lawyer. Mom's casting of dad in the role of barbarian reflects the negative view of the natural world perennially taken by civilization, wherein the ever-present inner barbarian is released through an eliding of societal constraints, an eliding supposedly entailed by contact with wilderness. Dad as barbarian is Calvin the monster grown-up. Calvin therefore is the child as father of the man—though the representation does not assume a romantic view of human nature. Together, Calvin's parents represent the modern ambivalence about close contact with the natural world.

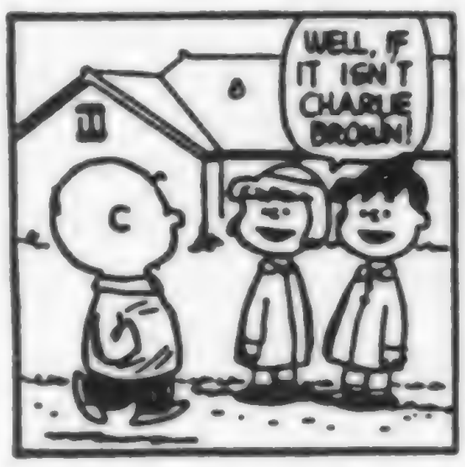
Calvin and Hobbes portrays a contemporary view of the natural world that retains only vestiges of a romantic primitivism in suspension with negative attitudes, using camping as a primary arena of demonstration. A negative view of the call from the wild is clearest when the focus remains solely on Calvin. For example, primitivism is the explicit theme of "The Yukon Song," which prefaces the third collection of cartoons, *Yukon Ho!* (1989). This song calls for an escape from "crabby teachers" and "parental rules" and for a life where timber wolves are friends and one can "act real primitive." The song, however, emphasizes only one aspect of the Rousseauistic conception of primitivism, for the notion asserted is not the natural goodness of people, merely the fetters of society. Thus Calvin rejoices at being lost in the woods, saying, "We'll be free from the constraints of civilization!"[21] Given Calvin's monstrous capacity for mischief, one might well expect the behavior his mom implies when she calls dad Conan the Barbarian. And, in a childish sense, when Calvin "secedes" from his family and runs off to the Yukon to do as he pleases, that is just what is shown, for he only travels as far as the nearby woods before he fights with Hobbes and decides to return home. The comic irony is perfect. Once within the traditional symbolic site for the primitive, the woods, Calvin cannot keep his own desires under control, suggesting the natural barbarity of the natural child.

If *Calvin and Hobbes*, more than any contemporary comic strip, suggests a Calvinistic view of children, it also adds a dark background to that dark portrait by depicting the Hobbesian notion that the world is a brutal, dangerous place. Once again, the primary trope to express this idea is "monster" and the primary stage on which to demonstrate it is Calvin's fantasy life. Within that imaginative world, almost anything can become a monster. A list would include obvious examples such as authority figures—mom, dad, and Miss Wormwood the teacher—plus clear sources of fear—Moe, the schoolyard bully, or the doctor. Modern living can also generate fearful fantasies, for example when Calvin's sandbox city is "threatened" by a nearby toxic waste dump, or he offends Susie by speculating on what really goes into processed meat.[22]

Although Watterson may use Calvin's horrific daydreams as one technique for making social commentary, and although he also makes use of *Calvin and Hobbes* to express rather sophisticated statements about life and the cosmos, the genius in his use of monsters lies in the ability to project a sense of general dread about the world in a way that might fit plausibly with a six-year-old's view of life, where even play is fraught with anxieties. Thus both Spaceman Spiff and Stupendous Man are used to show Calvin's fear of going down a playground slide, and a shadow show of Calvin's own making turns into a monster. The generality and pervasiveness of Calvin's anxiety is actually best represented by the strips in which no monsters of any sort are actually depicted—when Calvin imagines monsters under his bed.[23]

Of course, a general sense of dread about the world defines Charlie Brown. Charlie worries that others are talking about him and worries that others are not talking about him. He will refuse to play marbles because he thinks he will lose and that would just depress him, or he is certain beforehand that someone will destroy his sand castle as soon as it is finished. Perennially laughed at as the lowest in the pecking order, the kid whom the other kids barely tolerate, Charlie has good reason to worry even before the fact. He never gets Valentines because no one likes him. Lucy cannot bring herself merely to say she likes him. Snoopy does not even know his name, referring to Charlie as the "round-headed kid." Failure is the essence of Charlie's actions. He never kicks the football, never wins a baseball game, and never manages to fly his kite. He is wishy-washy and so he never gathers enough resolve to say hello to the little red-haired girl. Charlie Brown is a perennial flop with a perennial case of low self-esteem. He has a right to his general sense of dread. He has earned it.

This theme of childhood *angst* reveals more than any other single feature the affinity of *Peanuts* with *Calvin and Hobbes*, yet, at the same time, illustrates a crucial difference in tone. Part of the charm of Charlie Brown lies in his ability to be optimistic just one more time. He will always try to fly his kite in the fall and win a baseball game in the spring. He will always try to kick the football no matter how many times Lucy manipulates his hopes and then



Laughter as a sign of aggression: *Peanuts* reprinted by permission United Features Syndicate

disappoints him. As Thomas Inge says, Charlie belongs to the folk tradition of the lost soul because of his preoccupations with things that possess all of us.[24] We may laugh at him, but we also see ourselves in him and sympathize with him, too. This sentiment, plus the identification entailed, makes Charlie very different from Calvin, who elicits much less sympathy. For example, Calvin's failure to hit Susie with a snowball even though she is well within range constitutes his bad luck; a sudden downpour just as Charlie is finally going to say hello to the little red-haired girl constitutes his. Calvin is

much more a satiric character because his antics create more comic distance than the comic identity of humor, even though readers may also recognize themselves in Calvin. Calvin caricatures that recognizable self's undesirable aspects, so the laughter has the chill of ridicule: Charlie caricatures that recognizable self's mere foibles, so the laughter has the warmth of humor.[25] The more brutal nature of Calvin's comic quality is mirrored in his world. While Calvin's biggest worry in the schoolyard is whether or not he can escape Moe the bully, Charlie's biggest worry in the schoolyard is whether or not he can meet the little red-haired girl. One character illustrates a comic look at fear, the other a comic look at love.

At bottom, the difference between the way *Peanuts* and *Calvin and Hobbes* portray childhood *angst* is the more elaborate use of fantasy in the latter comic strip, which functions as the pictorial sign for a greater intensity of emotion. Thus *Peanuts* represents Charlie Brown's fear of failing to fly his kite as the kite-eating tree, depicted simply as an ordinary tree. *Calvin and Hobbes*, on the other hand, represents Calvin's fears with images taken from the viewpoint of his own inner eye, such as a trip down the playground slide shown as a crash landing in outer space.[26] For the reader, the intimacy of that viewpoint translates into an appreciation of how much dread Calvin is experiencing. In this sense, the reader knows Calvin better than any of the *Peanuts* characters. The depth of both Calvin's fears and his imaginative treatment of them means that the most mundane of items such as his clothes, his lunchbag, or a bowl of oatmeal can be fantastically fearful. Similarly, typical activities such as riding his bicycle or jumping into a pile of leaves are pictured as dangerous. Even sneezing creates an occasion to imagine danger. Sometimes Calvin's pretense of danger is more instrumental, for example, in order to escape doing homework or taking a bath. In Calvin's world, anything can be a source of monstrous terror, suggesting that fear and dread are at least equal to fun and delight as the major components of a child's emotional life. As Calvin himself says after a run-in with Moe: "People who get nostalgic about childhood were obviously never children."[27]

Watterson's primary target with that comment would seem to be a sentimental view of childhood that obscures with a patina of good feeling some fundamental, if unpleasant, aspects of growing up. The obvious contemporary example of a comic strip that presents children as natural angels and childhood as virtually a completely sweet experience is Bil Keane's *The Family Circus*. Although the children in this strip dirty their clothes and exhibit sibling rivalry, they are rarely deliberately mischievous and never willfully destructive. Buster Brown puts balloons inside his own clothes and attaches the resultant effigy to a kite, making his mother think that the kite is carrying him away. Dennis upsets his mother by taking the extra sections of their dining room table to use as lumber for his clubhouse. And Calvin angers his father by taking a tire from the car to make a swing, which dad only discovers as he is about to leave for work. The bad behavior of *The Family Circus* kids is scaled down to merely naughty behavior, such as tearing pages out of a magazine; or transformed by naivete, such as wearing a watch with the alarm set to church.

Much of the sentiment of Keane's strip comes from its orientation to the parent's or grandparent's point of view. *Peanuts* always presents its situations from the kids' viewpoint. *Buster Brown*, *Dennis the Menace*, and *Calvin and Hobbes* nearly always present things from the kids' viewpoint. *The Family Circus* frequently shows us the adult side. One strip exemplifies this basic attitude by showing the father commenting on the gloomy weather and wondering if the sun will come out today. The last panel shows the mother carrying the youngest, P.J., toward the father who says, "It just did!"[28] This child-as-light-of-my-life motif illustrates the attitude underlying the other numerous portrayals of love and nurture in the strip as, for example, the mother's waking up the oldest boy, Billy, to say she loves him after recalling a day's worth of scoldings. If *Calvin and Hobbes* makes fun of those people who remember their own childhood through a nostalgic haze, *The Family Circus* prepares parents to become nostalgic about their children's childhood through a number of strips that point out how fast the kids will grow up. The message is not comic but sentimental: the joy of being a parent is now, amid the constant dirt and noise and sibling rivalry. Thus, even the mother's wish for a minute of silence is made without rancor. And Keane's strip completes this heavenly portrait of family life by explicitly making mother the guardian angel of her children.

Not only would Calvin be unrecognizable as a child performer in *The Family Circus*, but his parents would also not fit in. While Keane's mom and dad present an idealized image of perpetual nurturing, Watterson's mom and dad demonstrate a more realistic attitude: "Being a parent is wanting to hug and strangle your kid at the same time," says Calvin's dad. Moreover, just as Calvin's fantasy life is

Calvin(istic) creation: *Calvin and Hobbes* © Watterson. Dist. by Universal Press Syndicate. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.

Calvin and Hobbes by Watterson

First there was nothing...
...then there was Calvin!
Calvin, the mighty god, creates the universe with pure will!
From utter nothingness comes swirling form! Life begins where once was void!
But Calvin is no kind and loving god! He's one of the old gods! He demands sacrifice!
Yes, Calvin is a god of the underworld! And the puny inhabitants of earth displease him!
The great Calvin ignores their pleas for mercy and the doomed writhe in agony!
HAVE YOU SEEN HOW ABSORBED CALVIN IS WITH THOSE TINKERTOYS? HE'S CREATING WHOLE WORLDS OVER THERE!
I'LL BET HE GROWS UP TO BE AN ARCHITECT.

given free rein and sets him apart from his peers, the fantasies of mom and dad are also shown. Thus they can not only express regret at Calvin's existence, but also fantasize about getting rid of him, or laugh when the babysitter mentions a cattle prod. Dad once asks mom to break Calvin's legs, and both parents separately imagine murder. Calvin's sense of this hostility shows in one example in which he asks his mother if he is adopted or if his parents are fattening him for the dinner table. In short, the myth of the ideal family, which is very nearly what *The Family Circus* represents, is subverted in *Calvin and Hobbes* by the rendering of everyone's fears, hostilities, and frustrations. Similarly, the notion that the family that plays together stays together is exploded at the end of a number of strips portraying the annual family camping trip that is often a series of mishaps. Calvin's dad says such outings are nevertheless valuable because they "give us a chance to be together as a family and learn about ourselves." The homily is undercut, however, when dad agrees with Calvin's description of what was learned: "Like how we can't stand being in such close proximity with one another this long?"[29] Though *The Family Circus* is quite capable of showing the kids wishing for a microwave while camping or ignoring the splendor of the Grand Canyon during the family vacation, no stretch of the imagination could accommodate its ethos with the frank realism of family relationships shown in *Calvin and Hobbes*. For that matter, such frankness or realism does not exist in any of the other strips analyzed.

This more realistic representation of parents also makes it clear that Calvin's mom and dad do not suffer from a distorting nostalgia. They were obviously children. Watterson portrays this fact not only directly, when Calvin remarks that grandma says mom acted just like he does, but also indirectly (and more often) in dad's teasing and playful behavior. Moreover, both parents demonstrate the liveliness of imagination one expects from Calvin when, for instance, they employ grotesque descriptions of food to interest Calvin in eating. Clearly, Calvin comes by his behavior honestly. Calvin and his parents, as comic representations of people, suggest that the (monstrous) child is indeed father to the man and mother to the woman.[30]

These examples of less-than-ideal behavior by parent and child do not mean, however, that Watterson portrays a mean, loveless family. Far from it. Though his task would seem to be a humorous emphasis on the negative behavior of adults as well as children, clear moments of affection also exist, as when dad goes off into the woods near the house, at night, to discover where Calvin left Hobbes; or when mom pampers Calvin with hot chocolate on a winter's day. Calvin can even act civilized, by apologizing to Susie; or express tenderness and sorrow, by worrying about the fate of an injured baby raccoon he finds in the woods and crying when it dies. And, of course, Calvin loves Hobbes.[31]

In an afterword to *Lazy Sunday Book*, Watterson says that "little boys, like tigers, will roam all the territory they can get."[32] This statement captures the primary function of Hobbes: he symbolizes Calvin's psychic life, in particular Calvin's imagination and desire for complete freedom. Without a doubt, actually depicting Hobbes as Calvin imagines him—a living playmate with his own personality—creates a magic that sets *Calvin and Hobbes* apart from any comic strip, past or present. As a focal point for Calvin's fantasy play, Hobbes enables a kind of therapy, a release of emotions as well as mental stimulation. Indeed, Hobbes serves multiple functions. He can, for example, be seen as analogous to Linus's blanket, supplying a sense of security. As an effigy of a tiger, however, Hobbes can be Calvin's aggressive alter ego too—the beast in the little boy. One of the recurring motifs in the strip is Calvin being attacked by Hobbes when he returns home from school, but any number of other examples depict the two of them as antagonists whose play has degenerated into fighting or even as siblings who fight over the bedcovers. Part of the freedom that Hobbes symbolizes stems from the way he provides Calvin with a safe outlet for the aggression of the "natural" child. Similarly, Hobbes also allows Calvin to express indirectly libido.[33]

This essay emphasizes the idea that a most remarkable feature of *Calvin and Hobbes* is the dark tone of its comic presentation, and that the key to that presentation is Watterson's genius for depicting Calvin's fantasy life. It would be unfair to Watterson, however, to leave out the positive use he makes of Hobbes. Hobbes also expresses Calvin's better nature, as when Hobbes wishes for a sunny field while Calvin schemes for money and power; or when he reminds Calvin that a slow pace is the advantage of camping, not its drawback. In instances of this kind, Hobbes is not a symbol of brute aggression. Rather, like Jiminy Cricket, he functions as conscience for a hard-headed little boy.[34]

Yet one more role exists for Hobbes, a role in which Watterson expands dramatically Hobbes's basic function as the symbol of a little boy's inner life: the tiger as philosopher. More precisely, Hobbes is often shown as the sounding board for the musings of Calvin, musings that are at times beyond a six-year old in both their scope and tone. If Calvin's

musings are not realistic in the sense that six-year olds do not discuss such subjects in such terms, Hobbes as philosopher does express the idea that children are often far more sophisticated than adults suspect—especially those who sentimentalize childhood. For example, Calvin wonders about the nature of the universe. Looking at earth from an astronaut's viewpoint during a fantasy trip to Mars, Calvin says, "Surely everything fits together and has a purpose, a reason for being." The key word here is "surely," an indicator of the need to persuade himself. This uncertainty becomes more explicit at the end of a series of strips about an injured baby raccoon that dies. Calvin sees no point to the death of one so young and obviously innocent. "It's either mean or it's arbitrary," he sums up, a statement that either indicts god and cosmic design or challenges the existence of both. The frustration of not knowing is shown when Calvin says that his questions about Santa—why the secrecy and mystery, what is the meaning of "all this" if he does not exist—apply to God as well. These questions are of course perennial ones for human beings, and one should not expect answers from a comic strip.[35]

If comic strips do not provide answers, they do dramatize attitudes, and the link between God and Santa suggests the basic question of good versus bad behavior. The theme of being good for a reward is used in all of the comic strips under consideration in a variety of ways. Usually the motivation is Christmas. For *The Family Circus*, Christmas provides the opportunity to use the children as a way to underscore the warmth and joy that traditionally accompanies the holiday. Thus a Christmas light symbolizes warmth and happiness, Dolly becomes a gift when she is under the mistletoe, and the gifts the children as a group give to their parents are the memories they are making by just being themselves. When admonished by mom to be good, all the children comply without complaint. During Christmas week in *Buster Brown*, Buster patiently waits for Santa and then falls asleep. When he awakes the next morning, the decorated Christmas tree is next to his bed, suggesting his basically worthy nature. Charlie Brown demonstrates his fundamentally good nature when he corrects his sister Sally about the true nature of the season—giving not getting. In *Peanuts*, Lucy is the child whose moral status always becomes an issue as Christmas approaches, trying to be good but not succeeding very well. The same is true of Dennis. Thus Dennis eagerly ingratiates himself with the store Santa, and his advice to Joey is to have a Christmas stocking that stretches. The mania for acquiring as many presents as possible that the stretchable stocking represents is a motif in nearly all the comic strips, even *The Family Circus*. Predictably, none carry it as far as Calvin, who plans to hijack Santa by closing the flue after he comes down the chimney. Calvin explicitly says that he hates being good and that whatever good behavior he exhibits at Christmas time constitutes an admission he can be bribed. Calvin's attitude about Christmas indicates his typical behavior, for his actions are always marked by an excess, an excess beyond even the "high spirits" that characterize Buster or Dennis, though not beyond the outrageousness that marks Hans and Fritz. *Calvin and Hobbes* thus routinely exceeds the boundary of the bad boy stereotype, an excess neatly captured by the trope "monster."

Calvin and Hobbes is excessive or monstrous in another way, too, namely in Watterson's willingness to raise difficult philosophical issues in the midst of a comic strip. When he raises such issues, Watterson suggests how a philosopher resembles a boy and a tiger, for all three symbolize a need to roam all possible territory. Watterson dramatizes the difficulty of faith when Calvin says that his dissatisfaction with the mysteriousness of Santa echoes the questions he has about God. Calvin doubts the existence of Santa, and then decides to believe, parodying Pascal's gamble about the existence of God: Calvin may as well believe because if Santa does not exist, he has lost nothing; and if Santa does exist, Calvin can collect lots of "loot." When Hobbes remarks that the attitude is "cynically enterprising," Calvin responds by saying that "it's the spirit of Christmas."[36] When the kids in *The Family Circus* mix up God and Santa, it is in prayer or in their own retelling of the story of the first Christmas. In such instances, there is no doubt about God's existence. The focus instead is on the mixup as a source of endearing humor.

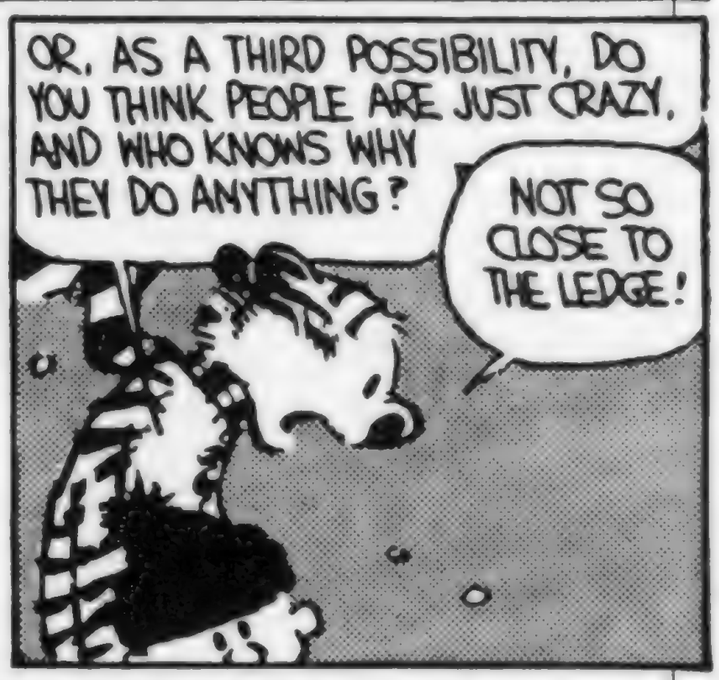
Calvin and Hobbes does seem to decide the issue of God's existence favorably. More apropos for the argument here, the nature of God is consistent with Calvinist theology: if God is not exactly mean, his style is definitely Old Testament, one commensurate with the description, "I am a jealous God."[37] Such a statement implies the need for punishment, an idea Calvin demonstrates when he treats his loss of Hobbes as something he deserves, or when he responds to Hobbes's direct question, "Do you think there's a God?" by saying, "Well, *some*body's out to get me." The one time Calvin plays God, he imagines himself as "no kind and loving God [but] one of the *old* gods!"[38]

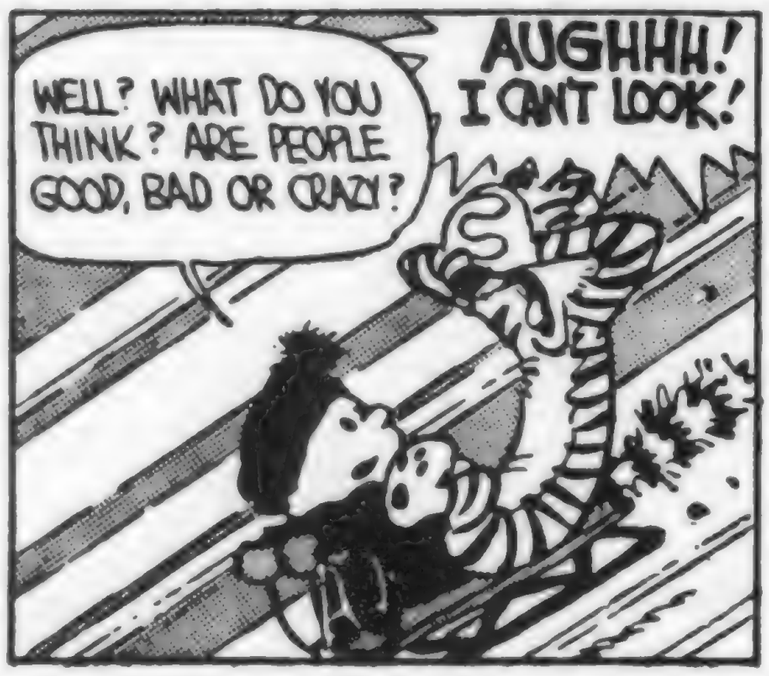
The necessity for punishment implies incorrigible behavior, something the reader sees often with Calvin. He tells his mother he has sold his soul to

calvin and hobbes

by WATTERSON

I MEAN, DO YOU THINK PEOPLE ARE BASICALLY GOOD, WITH A FEW BAD TENDENCIES, OR BASICALLY BAD, WITH A FEW GOOD TENDENCIES?
THERE'S A ROCK UP AHEAD! LOOK OUT!





the devil, and his announced ethics are the ends justify the means. When Susie tries to stop him from throwing a snowball at her by telling him that Santa is watching, Calvin considers the matter and then hits her anyway, saying, "Oh yes! YES! It was worth it! What a shot! I'm not sorry! Oh, it was beautiful! I'd do it again in an minute! Ha Ha!" Only Hans and Fritz can match that unrepentence when the promise of a trip to the circus is not enough to deter them from causing trouble. In another strip Calvin refuses to make any new year's resolutions, declaring loudly that he does not need improvement although the world does. When he asks Hobbes about his resolutions, the response is, "Well, I had resolved to be less offended by human nature, but I think I blew it already." In yet another strip Calvin himself agrees with Hobbes's implied assertion that animals are morally superior to humans when he complains that Moe is "mean just for kicks," and says "animals sometimes make a lot more sense." Here the reader comes full circle to Calvin's accusation that the universe is mean or arbitrary. Moe's behavior suggests both, his sadistic pleasure a demonstration of arbitrary meanness. Indeed, Calvin's complaint about Moe is itself inconsistent, if not arbitrary, because he is quite capable of taking pleasure in abusing Susie or driving his parents crazy.[39]

In one of the best examples of how Hobbes as tiger philosopher injects important questions into a comic strip, Calvin confronts a basic question. "Hobbes," he says, "do you think human nature is good or evil? I mean, do you think people are basically good, with a few bad tendencies, or basically bad, with a few good tendencies?"[40] The main point in this examination of *Calvin and Hobbes* has been to suggest that the strip's answer to the question is often the latter. Thus Calvin is capable of apologizing to Susie for being mean, but he does so in a way that undercuts his sincerity. Furthermore, this view of human nature can be usefully characterized as a latter-day Calvinism and is deliberate on the part of Watterson, hence Calvin's name. However, the particular strip now being considered emphasizes the adjective in "latter-day Calvinism" when Calvin offers Hobbes a third possible description of human nature—". . . do you think people are just crazy, and who knows why they do anything?"[41]—and Hobbes decides that choice fits best. Though the description "basically bad, with a few good tendencies" describes much of Calvin's behavior, the action of this particular strip reinforces Hobbes's choice: they are on Calvin's sled, going downhill at breakneck speed until they hit a tree. It would seem that if Calvin as the "natural" child represents people's inevitable tendency to behave badly, a view that echoes John Calvin's sixteenth century theology, a twentieth century element of absurdity to the behavior of human beings must also be counted.

Bill Watterson's formula of using a six-year old boy and his toy tiger puts his comic strip in touch with predecessors like *Buster Brown*, *The Katzenjammer Kids*, *Dennis the Menace*, and *Peanuts*, as well as creating distance from them. *Calvin and Hobbes* portrays the darker capacities of human beings in a way that bears affinities with John Calvin's and Thomas Hobbes's views of humanity and existence. With that portrait Watterson also pokes fun at overly sentimental views of children. By focussing on Calvin's fantasy that Hobbes is alive, Watterson also gives his strip a unique ability to represent comically the tiger in everyone. Whether that tiger represents the philosophical capacity to ask uncomfortable questions or the imagination that sometimes veers toward the childish propensity for uncivilized behavior that Sigmund Freud labelled "id" does not matter. *Calvin and Hobbes* calls from each of those wild places. ●

Hobbes on human nature: *Calvin and Hobbes* © Watterson. Dist. by Universal Press Syndicate. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.

NOTES

1. *Hogan's Alley*, featuring the Yellow Kid, is regarded by most commentators to be the first true newspaper comic strip. See Arthur Asa Berger, *The Comic-Stripped American* (New York: Walker and Company, 1973); Pierre Couperie, et al., *A History of the Comic Strip* trans. Eileen B. Hennessy (New York: Crown Publishers, 1968); Robert C. Harvey, *The Art of the Funnies: An Aesthetic History* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994); M. Thomas Inge, *Comics as Culture* (Jackson and London: University Press of Mississippi, 1990); Coulton Waugh, *The Comics* (New York: Macmillan, 1947). Winsor McCay's *Little Nemo in Slumberland* has not been used for comparison because the focus here is boys who "naturally act badly" and Nemo does not fit that mold. The *Calvin and Hobbes* texts for this analysis have been limited to the early collections for reasons of space but also to emphasize Watterson's initial conception of the strip. Examples are from *Calvin and Hobbes* (1987), *Something Under the Bed is Drooling* (1988), *Yukon Ho!* (1989), *Lazy Sunday Book* (1989), and *The Authoritative Calvin and Hobbes* (1990), all published by Andrews and McMeel. Buster Brown is represented by Richard Outcault, *Buster Brown, A Complete Compilation: 1906* (Westport, CT.: Hyperion Press, 1977). *The Katzenjammer Kids* examples are from Rudolph Dirks, *The Katzenjammer Kids: Early Strips in Full Color* (New York: Dover, 1974). The other strips are

represented randomly, on the assumption that the main features are constant: Bil Keane, *Behold the Family Circus* (Nashville, TN.: Thomas Nelson, 1989) and *Quiet, Sam!* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1990); Hank Ketcham, *Dennis the Menace: Teacher's Threat* (1959), *Ambassador of Mischief* (1960), and *Driving Mother up the Wall* (1976), all published by Fawcett; Charles M. Schulz, *Hey, Peanuts!* (Greenwich, CT.: Fawcett, 1954), *The Wonderful World of Peanuts* (1954), *For the Love of Peanuts* (1956), *You're My Hero, Charlie Brown* (1961), *We Love You Snoopy* (1962), *It's for You, Snoopy* (1965), *That's Life, Snoopy* (1973), and *You're a Knockout, Charlie Brown* (1989), all published by Ballantine Books.

2. Wordsworth's "Ode" is used as a convenient marker for what can loosely be called a romantic conception of children, but more precisely, the idea that children are naturally good gains most of its acceptance in the wake of the poem, not with the Romantics but with the Victorians. See Barbara Garlitz, "The Immortality Ode: Its Cultural Progeny," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 6 (1966): 639-649; and Roderick McGillis, "Childhood and Growth: George MacDonald and William Wordsworth," in *Romanticism and Children's Literature in Nineteenth-Century England*, ed. James Holt McGavran, Jr. (Athens and London: University Press of Georgia, 1991). In America two early advocates of the positive view of children were the transcendentalist writer Bronson Alcott, whose daughter Louisa May Alcott wrote well-known novels about children, and the writer Lydia Maria Child in her volume on child-rearing, *The Mother's Book* (1831). The most influential argument for the notion that children were naturally good was made by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in *Emile, or On Education* (1762); though Phillipe Aries, in *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), sketches the background for the idea in the chapter entitled "From Immodesty to Innocence." In *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men* (1754), Rousseau discussed positively peoples in a state of nature, encapsulated in his famous phrase "le bon sauvage." The link between children and a "primitive state of nature" is a basic theme for Watterson in *Calvin and Hobbes*. In "The Politics of Childhood: Wordsworth, Blake, and the Catechistic Method," *ELH* 56 (1989): 853-868, Alan Richardson points out the link in Wordsworth between innocent children and a rustic, natural life.

3. Although Puritan parents were fond of their children and capable of tender sentiment, children were routinely figured in negative ways (e.g. "children of wrath") within theological discourse. A line from an Anne Bradstreet poem, "Childhood," captures the paradox, referring to a child as "A serpent's sting in pleasing face hid." Quoted in Peter Gregg Slater, *Children in the New England Mind: In Death and in Life* (Hamden, CT.: Archon Books, 1977), 22; and Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England*, revised edition (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 93. See also Sandford Fleming, *Children and Puritanism: The Place of Children in the Life and Thought of the New England Churches, 1620-1847* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1933), especially chapters 8 and 9.

4. For a brief description of Hobbes's view of the state of nature, see "*The Elements of Law*: Reason versus Rhetoric," in David Johnston, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes and the Politics of Cultural Transformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). Ellen Handler Spitz also notes the playful evoking of John Calvin and Thomas Hobbes, as well as polarized views of children current in the seventeenth century, in "*Calvin and Hobbes*: Postmodern and Psychoanalytic Perspectives," *Psychoanalytic Review* 80 (1993): 55-82. Hobbes of course is more than an evocation of Thomas Hobbes, as noted below: the trope of monsters should be seen as the dark thread in the tapestry of *Calvin and Hobbes*.

5. A simple notation for reference to specific strips in Watterson's books has been adopted so that the reader may easily find them. Thus *Calvin and Hobbes* becomes *CH*; *Something Under the Bed is Drooling* is *SD*; *Yukon Ho!* is *YH*; *Lazy Sunday Book* is *SB*; and *The Authoritative Calvin and Hobbes* is *TA*. Numbers refer to page and whether the strip is first, second, or third on that page. Sunday strips are simply referred to by page. Thus the reference to the strip wherein Rosalyn the babysitter calls Calvin a little monster is *CH*, 86.2, meaning the second strip on page 82 of *Calvin and Hobbes*. Other references in the paragraph to Calvin as monster: a giant (*CH*, 115); a giant amoeba (*SD*, 82.3); a zombie (*SD*, 116.3); a werewolf (*CH*, 26.3); a generic prehistoric monster (*SD*, 62); Godzilla (*CH*, 54.3); a generic dinosaur (*SD*, 79.2); a pterodactyl (*YH*, 121.3); a pteranodon (*SB*, 104); and, his favorite—a tyrannosaurus rex (*CH*, 79.2; *SD*, 29; *SD*, 127; *SB*, 51; *SB*, 55; *SB*, 77; *SB*, 101; *TA*, 145; *TA*, 214.3; *TA*, 248.3). Calvin as ordinary animals: an eagle (*SD*, 85.1), octopus (*CH*, 38.1), crocodile (*CH*, 89.3), or shark (*CH*, 99.2). Feeding people to alligators (*TA*, 195.2). Biting mom (*TA*, 77). Given this predilection for animal imagery, it is interesting to note that Calvinist theology often resorted to animals as a way to describe children. Already noted is the line from Anne Bradstreet's poem, "Childhood": "A serpent's sting in pleasing face hid." Two very famous preachers referred to children as "rattlesnakes" and "alligators" (George Whitefield), or "young vipers" (Jonathan Edwards): Fleming, *Children and Puritanism*, 69.

6. Three ways to flood the house: Watterson, *Calvin and Hobbes*, 38.1; Ketcham, *Teacher's Threat*, n. p.; Outcault, *Buster Brown*, 101.

7. Dirks, *Katzenjammer Kids*, 2.

8. Dirks, *Katzenjammer Kids*, 4.

9. Calvin: not responsible (*TA*, 152.3); inverse relationship (*CH*, 80.1); chalk pictures (*TA*, 212.1). On *The Katzenjammer Kids*, Waugh says that Hans and Fritz "carried their fiendishness to apocalyptic heights" (*The Comics*, 45). Cf. Berger, *The Comic-Stripped American*, 35-46; Couperie, *A History of the Comic Strip*, 19-20.

10. That grin: *SD*, 127. In *Buffo: The Genius of Vulgar Comedy* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1978) Anthony Caputi talks about the attendant devils in medieval carnival parades as the leading mischief and fun makers. From such figures come the later *commedia dell'arte* characters Harlequin and Pulchinella (56-63). Caputi describes these figures in terms that sound like the boys in the comic strips: ". . . all these figures . . . had the common function of stirring things up, of generating noise and hilarity." (56)

11. For a negative view of children's laughter: Schulz, *You're My Hero, Charlie Brown*, n. p.

12. Two other elements that carry *Calvin and Hobbes* well beyond the representations of other strips featuring children are omitted for reasons of space: Calvin's adult-style daydreams and his language. Respective examples are *CH*, 50.3 and *YH*, 114.

13. Fantasies in *Peanuts*, for example, seem more often to be literalized than in *Calvin and Hobbes*; that is, the kids

in the former dress up like cowboys and Indians to pretend to shoot one another while Calvin's fantasy of Spaceman Spiff is usually all internal. Snoopy's Red Baron scenario is perhaps closer to Spaceman Spiff. Fantasy as a topic obviously connects *Calvin and Hobbes* with *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, but even this link has an important distinction: Nemo is sleeping, Calvin is not. Insofar as the play of the unconscious reveals character, the two boys may be compared, but that is beyond the scope of this essay. Calvin's fantasies: wishes for a chainsaw (*SD*, 82.2) or a flamethrower (*CH*, 64.3); maneuvering toy cars into a crash (*CH*, 19.3); destruction of an entire "city" of sand (*CH*, 9.3; *YH*, 13.1; *YH*, 37.1); mini-van crash (*SD*, 84).

14. *YH*, 94.3.

15. Gaile McGregor, *The Noble Savage in the New World Garden: Notes Toward a Syntactics of Place* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988); Edward Halsey Foster, *The Civilized Wilderness: Backgrounds to American Romantic Literature, 1817-1860* (New York: the Free Press, 1975); Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, revised edition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973). Nash (63) suggests that, on one level, this split of opinions about the effects of nature on people is a question of business versus pleasure, Puritans and pioneers who view wilderness as either obstacle or means to a goal versus poets and philosophers who conceive wilderness as a source of aesthetics or a site of contemplation. McGregor (15) notes in regard to the concept of the noble savage that its root ambiguity should be seen as one of its most important psychological bases of appeal. As well as historical background, McGregor's study discusses twentieth century American literary examples up to the 1960s.

16. A good example of this in American literature is Daisy in Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall*, published in 1855.

17. Calvin practices "wormmucking" (*CH*, 101.2); collecting "stamped bugs," (*CH*, 104.3); messing with flowers' minds (*CH*, 114.2); a fish bites Calvin (*CH*, 74.3).

18. A crucial ingredient in establishing the worth of the natural world was the concept of "the sublime" (Nash, *Wilderness*, 45). The ambivalence associated with that concept, especially in twentieth century American poetry, is traced in Rob Wilson, *American Sublime: The Genealogy of a Poetic Genre* (Madison and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).

19. Foster, *Civilized Wilderness*, 8, makes it clear that at least since 1825, when the Erie Canal opened up western New York to urban tourists, Americans have wanted to mitigate the experience of roughing it with creature comforts. The quote is from *CH*, 84.

20. Grounds for divorce: (*YH*, 45.1); Calvin likes camping: (*YH*, 41.2); hates it: (*TA*, 181.2 & *YH*, 41.1); cleaning fish: (*YH*, 43 & *CH*, 111.3); Dad as Conan the Barbarian: (*TA*, 183.1).

21. *YH*, 48.

22. Mom (*CH*, 76.1); dad (*CH*, 8; *SB*, 78); Miss Wormwood the teacher (*CH*, 10.2; 14; 28.1; 32.3; 48.1; 73.2); Moe the schoolyard bully (*CH*, 39.1 & 2 & 3; 76.3); the doctor (*CH*, 66.1 & 2); toxic waste dump (*YH*, 13.1); processed meat (*YH*, 74.2)

23. The monster under the bed motif appears four times in the first collection (*CH*, 8; 9.1; 19.2; 52); three times in the third collection (*YH*, 12; 27; 80), and twice in *Lazy Sunday Book* (23, 38). It also gives the second collection of cartoons its name, *Something Under the Bed is Drooling*, a line taken from the opening cartoon. The playground slide (*CH*, 18; *YH*, 75.1); shadow shown as monster (*SD*, 33.3).

24. Inge, *Comics as Culture*, 105.

25. See Stuart Tave, *The Amiable Humorist: A Study in the Comic Theory and Criticism of the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960) for a discussion of these distinctions.

26. Slide as crash-landing: *CH*, 18.

27. Mundane items can be fantastically fearful: clothes (*SD*, 40), lunchbag (*CH*, 69), a bowl of oatmeal (*CH*, 24). Typical activities pictured as dangerous: riding his bicycle (*SD*, 13.1); jumping into a pile of leaves (*YH*, 64); sneezing (*YH*, 46; *SD*, 86). Pretense of danger is instrumental: to escape doing homework (*SD*, 106; *YH*, 6.1); taking a bath (*CH*, 11; *SD*, 88.1). Encounter with Moe (*YH*, 71.1).

28. Keane, *Behold the Family Circus*, 68.

29. Being a parent: (*TA*, 197.1). Fantasies of mom and dad: regret at Calvin's existence (*CH*, 100; *CH*, 82.1; *SD*,37); get rid of him (*YH*, 112.2); laugh about a cattle prod (*YH*, 65.3); break Calvin's legs (*YH*, 77.3); imagine murder (*CH*, 49; *CH*, 111.1). Calvin's sense of hostility (*SD*, 66.3). Family cannot get along: (*TA*, 185.3).

30. Mom acted just like Calvin (*YH*, 35.3); dad's playful behavior (*SD*, 11; *SD*, 38.3; *SD*, 49).

31. Dad discovers where Calvin left Hobbes (*YH*, 61.2); mom pampers Calvin (*YH*, 113). Calvin apologizes to Susie (*SD*, 69.3; 70.3); expresses sorrow about baby raccoon (*SD*, 95.1; 95.3). Calvin's love for Hobbes (*SB*, 95; *CH*, 22.3).

32. *SB*, 127.

33. Play degenerates into fighting (*YH*, 114; *SB*, 27); fight over the bedcovers (*SB*, 54). Hobbes as expression of libido (*CH*, 12.2; *CH*, 29.1; *YH*, 28.2; *TA*, 165.1; *TA*, 172.1). A variation on the Hobbes-as-antagonist role is when Hobbes functions as a scapegoat: e.g. Calvin ties himself to a chair but blames Hobbes (*YH*, 91.3); Hobbes supplying an absurd answer for Calvin's homework (*CH*, 50.1); gruesome drawing of a tiger eating people (*SD*, 90). See Spitz for a more complete psychoanalytic reading of Calvin's fantasy world.

34. Hobbes wishes for a sunny field (*CH*, 74.1); slow pace as the advantage of camping (*TA*, 185.1).

35. Everything has a purpose (*TA*, 222.1); mean or arbitrary (*SD*, 96.2); what's the meaning of "all this" (*YH*, 99.2).

36. Calvin hates being good (*SD*, 59.1); good behavior at Christmas time (*SD*, 93); the "spirit of Christmas" (*YH*, 100.1).

37. Deuteronomy 6:15, "For the Lord thy God is a jealous God among you."

38. One of the old gods (*YH*, 92); the need for punishment (*CH*, 91.2); "*some*body's out to get me" (*CH*, 82.2).

39. Calvin sold his soul (*SB*, 99); the ends justify the means (*SB*, 110); throwing a snowball at Susie (*SB*, 94); offended by human nature (*YH*, 105); "animals sometimes make a lot more sense..." (*YH*, 71.2); taking pleasure in abusing Susie (*SD*, 69)

40. *SD*, 71. Apologizing to Susie (*SD*, 70.3).

41. *SD*, 71.

Black Is the Color of My Comic Book Character

An Examination of Ethnic Stereotypes

BY CHRISTIAN DAVENPORT

Part of the historic agenda for civil rights and Black power organizations was a change in the portrayal of African Americans within the mass media. This agenda developed because representations of this minority group were frequently seen as offensive and unrepresentative. Another factor for change was the institution of the comics code in the 1950s that forbade "ridicule or attack on any religious or racial group." Over time the acceptance of this standard became clearly manifest within comics.[1] The improved economic status of Blacks was a third factor that necessitated greater sensitivity by companies concerned with the sale of their products to this group. By examining the image of Blacks in comic books, we can gauge whether or not the effort to portray more accurately African Americans as a diverse group of individuals has been successful. This particular issue is

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JAN
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SHADOW WAR
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
MILESTONE
HARDWARE
THE BIG BANG WAS JUST THE BEGINNING...
DIRECT SALES
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7 61941 20057 6

important not only because it provides a way to identify changes in ethnic stereotypes over time, but also because it allows us to examine systematically one way of communicating attitudes and opinions about race.

Within comic books a precarious balance has always been maintained between fantasy and reality. At the same time, another component to the story provided something to which readers could relate. Often this occurs through familiar physical settings like a school or an office. Generally, however, this "grounding" is most often found within the characters themselves. A way of speaking, a look, a personality trait, an emotion is given to a character that allows readers to label, recognize, and identify them. As a consequence of this process, individuals from Brooklyn would speak with an accent and make gestures with their hands; intergalactic pirates would drink some alcohol-like substance and plunder unsuspecting vessels; bikers (from any planet or microverse) would wear tattoos and dark glasses; and Blacks (whether they appeared on a street corner or on Mars) would be represented by characteristics that were/are usually associated with African Americans, such as threatening demeanor, high levels of athletic prowess, low intellectual capabilities, exotic and mysterious backgrounds, residence within an inner city, and menial employment or unemployment. This characterization was (and is) particularly harmful to Blacks for, even within a medium usually associated with fantasy and escape, they were not allowed to get away from American racism and ethnic stereotypes.

Over time there have been numerous studies of Black stereotypes.[2] Many were conducted by asking university students from around the country to identify particular traits on a list that they felt represented Blacks as well as other racial/ethnic groups. Although there are several limitations with this approach, such as nonrandom sample selection and forced categorization, this process does give an indication of how individuals perceive Blacks, since they are compelled to describe this group with regard to certain characteristics.

The characteristics selected by respondents in these studies have been generally negative, with the only variable being the extent of this negativity. Within a study conducted by Braly and Katz in 1933, Blacks were characterized as "superstitious," "lazy," "ignorant," "ostentatious," and "physically dirty."[3] Indeed, the only redeeming characteristics identified were being "musical," "happy-go-lucky" and "very religious," which can still be viewed as somewhat negative traits (especially if placed in context). In a 1971 study, several negative characteristics are still present with Blacks still categorized as "argumentative," "ostentatious," "emotional," "aggressive," "defiant" and "hostile." These characteristics are countered by several positive attributes like "open," "intelligent" and "straightforward".[4] This significantly improves the stereotype by increasing the diversity of characteristics used to describe Blacks, but the overall impression is still negative. In other words, some factors about Blacks are deemed positive, but most are still those that would be considered negative.

A similar investigation conducted in 1993 found the same pattern of characteristics to that identified within the earlier studies.[5] Blacks are still generally characterized as "argumentative," "emotional," "ostentatious," "aggressive," "boastful," "noisy" and "loud." Equally important is the fact that some of the more positive attributes no longer appear. No longer are Blacks described as "intelligent", "critical" or "sensitive." Although they are described as "witty" and "friendly," these two phrases might be considered negative within the context of African American stereotypes. Thus the image appears to be relatively static over time.

Reconfirming the results of this work, many of the same characteristics are found within different aspects of American media across the same time periods. Similar themes are found within film,[6] television[7] and advertising.[8] Most relevant to this analysis are two studies of ethnicity that examine cartoon art: the first investigating ethnic images in all comics (books as well as strips) in the twentieth century; and the second investigating cartoons in *The New Yorker* magazine from 1946 to 1987. The first study observed portrayals of Blacks from 1900 to the 1980s, with two distinct periods identified.[9] In the earlier period (1900 to 1960), Blacks tended to be represented as unidimensional characters closely associated with the stereotypes identified above, often being portrayed as superstitious savages (in the *Phantom*, *Tarzan*, and *Little Nemo in Slumberland*) or dim-witted servants (in *Abie the Agent* and *Bringing Up Father*). Within the latter time period (1960 to the 1980s), Blacks were found in numerous roles with varied levels of significance to the story line and a corresponding alteration in the representation of African Americans.

The second examination of Black stereotypes was undertaken by Thibodeau who conducted a content analysis of each cartoon published by *The New Yorker* from 1946 to 1987. This study complements the findings of the previous one rather well. Throughout the pre-1960 time period, Blacks are portrayed as mentally inferior and their image is directly race-related with the portrayals intended to represent Blacks as a group. From 1960 to 1987,

Blacks were found to be passive, cast in roles where they do not speak or where they were of secondary importance to the strip, and their image is "token" in nature where the character appears in a crowd, group or some other integrated setting. While not obviously characterizing Blacks negatively, this representation does treat them as marginal in importance, reinforcing the conception that Blacks are second class citizens, while simultaneously obscuring the exact standing of that citizenship.

To investigate stereotypes of Blacks in comic books, a content analysis of forty-two Black superhero comic book series was conducted.[11] (See the Appendix for a complete list of the works studied.) Sixty-five issues were randomly selected to investigate three factors: general characteristics of the superheroes; their relationships with other characters; and their use of superpowers. As general characteristics, all of the Black characters' superpowers (flight, strength, impenetrability, telekinesis, etc.) were itemized. Based upon existing stereotypes of Blacks being physically and athletically endowed, the characters might be expected to possess superpowers involving brute strength and/or athleticism. The underlying premise here is that these powers are not distributed randomly, but are given to superheroes to correspond with racial stereotypes of Black people. Since superheroes often lead double lives (their superhero life and their "normal" life where they perform everyday roles), it might be expected that the lives of the characters would be somewhat similar to those generally believed to be held by Blacks. This stereotype might include unemployment, reflecting the widely held belief that most Blacks are unemployed and/or on welfare.

Interaction between Black superheroes and other characters within the comic books was examined next. As many of the stereotypes identified in previous studies portray Blacks as being "aggressive," or "hostile," these character traits might be expected within comic book panels. To explore this possibility, the threatening nature of actions depicted by the superheroes was observed. The use of Black English was also examined in order to gauge the degree to which the character is portrayed as being unable to speak so-called standard English, thus maintaining the stereotype of the poorly educated or ignorant Black.

The third issue addressed concerned the application of the characters' superpowers: the relative balance between uses of brute force, athleticism and intelligence; the problems they confront (i.e., racism, crime and drugs, world domination, violence); and the target of the threat identified within a particular story line, such as the character's neighborhood, country, region, world or universe. The expectation was that Black superheroes would use brute force and athleticism over intellect; that they would confront crime and violence on earth more than intergalactic conflict or some other form of threat; and that they would generally be concerned with their own neighborhoods over the city, planet or universe. This expectation was based on the perception that Blacks are overly physical, involved with specific forms of drug-related or violent criminal behavior, and are usually involved in things that do not effect (or have limited implications for) the greater society.

The most notable feature of this analysis was the relatively small number of Black superheroes that have appeared in comic books since 1970.[12] From the first appearance of Luke Cage in 1972 as the first Black superhero to be the primary character in a comic book, only forty-two Black superheroes have been featured, thirty-two of which appeared in the last years surveyed. The identification of Black superheroes is not completely straightforward because many wear costumes, which makes it difficult to see their race. In addition, thirteen appeared briefly and then disappeared when the comic book featuring them was discontinued. Three appeared with teammates for the better part of their careers. Three others took over roles initially created for white characters. Twelve appear only in the context of a large team where they are featured as members.[13] Two initially start in superteams before going out on their own.

There appear to be three distinct periods of Black superheroes. From 1973 to 1978, seven Black superheroes existed (Black Goliath, Black Lightning, the Black Panther, Brother Voodoo, the Falcon, Luke Cage, and Storm). In the second period from 1983 to 1987 are several carryovers from the previous wave (Luke Cage teams up with Iron Fist, the Black Panther and the Falcon join the Avengers superteam, and Storm stays with the X-Men), plus several newcomers like Cloak, Strike, Megaton, Jim Rhodes as Iron Man, and John Stewart as the Green Lantern.[14] The most recent surge of Black characters is, however, by far the largest. Starting in 1991 and extending until this study ended in 1994, there were still several carryovers. More important, however, during this time period a significant number of Black superheroes was introduced, including Bishop, Brotherman, Captain Marvel, Ebony Warrior, Flatbush Native, Hardware, Horus, Icon and Rocket, Meteor Man, Night Thrasher, Nightwatch, Numidian Force, Original Man, Purge, Shadowhawk, Sustahgirl, Tribe, and Zwanna.

The powers held by Black superheroes are complex. Six characters surveyed use strength and two

Cover illustration for *Shadowhawk II* (July 1993). TM and ©1986 by Jim Valentino. Reprinted by permission.

use agility in the performance of their "superdoings," and seven use armor. Most, however, display significant variety. For example, three employ the absorption of other's powers; two use creation; two use lasers; one uses the weather; one uses speed; one uses invisibility; and one can do anything that he wants. Black superheroes are capable of doing anything that their white counterparts are, a significant challenge to the expected stereotype of limited superpowers.

This situation changes, however, if publication date is factored in, since diversity in powers is revealed only within the latter two time periods. During the first wave of Black superheroes, their powers range from strength (Luke Cage, Black Goliath), to agility/athleticism (Black Panther), to weather control (Storm), to magic (Brother Voodoo). All clearly fall within the realm of Black stereotypes, as the characters are portrayed as virile, naturally athletic, and mystical. During the second period, additional superpowers are identified including armor (Iron Man), the power of darkness (Cloak), and the power to create anything (Green Lantern). The roles of Black superheroes are altered, introducing more narrative possibilities. During the third period, powers expanded even further through lasers (Captain Marvel and Meteor Man), absorption (Bishop, Flatbush Native and Rocket), a Thor-like hammer (Horus), speed (Franklyn of Tribe), invisibility (Murdock of Tribe) and absolutely anything the character wanted (Original Man).

In no other area of American life have Blacks done as well economically as they have in comic books. Thirty-one of the characters surveyed have jobs. In the earliest period surveyed are several somewhat stereotypical positions (the Falcon was a social worker, Black Lighting was a high school teacher, Luke Cage and the Black Panther were private detectives), but the jobs depicted change dramatically in the latter two periods. Although two characters teach in high schools (Black Lightning and Sustah-girl), and two teach at the college level (Captain Marvel and Nightwatch), three are lawyers (Brotherman, Icon and Shadowhawk); one runs a bookstore (Ebony Warrior); and six characters have major corporate positions where they are the best in their respective fields (Black Goliath, Hardware, Jim Rhodes as Iron Man, Night Thrasher, Purge, and Steel)

The first few Black superheroes appearing from 1973 to 1978 (Black Goliath, Black Lightning, Black Panther, Brother Voodoo, Luke Cage, and the Falcon) exhibited a strong tendency towards threatening imagery. Nearly three fourths of the panels in these comics were identified as being threatening and the depiction of Blacks is consistent with existing stereotypes. By contrast, between 1983 and 1987, the content of the panels changed considerably. Half of the panels during this period were identified as threatening, the story lines develop more fully, and the time spent in active combat decreases. This change allowed more time for reflection, conversations with other characters, and general character development, as exemplified by John Stewart as Green Lantern. The final time period is also interesting as 57% of the panels were identified as threatening. Black superheroes became more threatening than the previous time period, but less threatening than the earliest one. A wide range of behaviors was depicted from the stereotypical image of the Blacks-as-savages perspective (in *Power Man* with Luke Cage, *Meteor Man*, *Nightwatch*, *Purge* and selected issues of *Flatbush Native*, *Original Man*, *Night Thrasher*, *Tribe* or *Zwanna*) to non-threatening representations (in *Brotherman*, *Ebony Warrior*, *Horus*, *Icon*, John Stewart episodes in *Green Lantern*, and *Static*), to balanced representations where threatening and non-threatening imagery is about even (*Hardware*, *Steel*, *Shadowhawk*, and *War Machine*).

Almost all of the comic books surveyed use Black English to some extent, perhaps explicitly identifying the race of the character in the eyes of the audience. At the same time, the stereotype that Blacks can only speak Black English is not supported. At one extreme is Luke Cage and all of the other characters within *Power Man* who use Black English almost exclusively. Many of the comic books examined (including *The Falcon*, *Hardware*, *Meteor Man*, *Shadowhawk*, *Static*, *Steel*, and *Zwanna*) mix Black and standard English. This practice tends to make and break the stereotype. On the one hand, it shows that Blacks retain certain stereotypical behavior patterns, and, on the other hand, it reveals that Blacks have a complex language structure combining certain aspects of African dialects as well as American English.

It is interesting to note that most non-superhero Blacks within the comics sampled used Black English, while the superheroes themselves spoke standard English (Black Goliath, Brotherman, Captain Marvel, Icon, Night Thrasher, Nightwatch, and Storm). While depicting diversity within the Black community, this finding twists the stereotype issue. The stereotype predicts that most Blacks would speak in the vernacular, and this is validated

because more Blacks in the comic books studied continue to use it. At the same time, since the superhero speaks standard English and this is established as the desirable trait, the reader is left with the message that standard English is the one to be emulated.

Only four Black superheroes in this study make no use of Black English at all (Bishop and Storm from the X-Men, Horus, and John Stewart as Green Lantern). In the case of Bishop and Storm the explanation is straightforward: Bishop is from the future, so he does not speak as Blacks do presently. Because Storm is from Africa, she does not speak the Black American vernacular either. Since Horus was born in ancient Egypt (before Black English existed), he does not use it. The explanation for John Stewart's not using Black English as Green Lantern is somewhat complicated. This character emerged from the streets of an inner city and initially spoke like most of the Blacks in residence there. When the character goes into outer space for an assignment on another planet, he is empowered with certain capabilities. He develops an extensive vocabulary and alters his speech pattern. This may be due to his lack of association with African Americans in space; or, alternatively, it may be that the writers of this comic book are suggesting that a Black person who is empowered does not speak Black English.

More than either athleticism or intelligence, Black superheroes are likely to use a significant amount of force in the performance of their "superduties." Once more, however, it is important to note the differences that exist over time. In the first time period, there are on average more than seven acts of brute force per comic book, while fewer than two acts of athleticism or intelligence are shown. *Black Lightning* is the most brutal series of the period with fourteen acts of brute force issue. The second and third most brutal comics are *Power Man* (*Luke Cage: Hero for Hire*), with twelve and ten acts of brute force, respectively. On the low end of the spectrum is the *Black Panther* with three. Overall in the early days of Black superheroes, the image of the brutal savage was well represented.

By the second period a more balanced use of superpowers emerges with the average number of brute force acts dropping slightly to about five per comic book; the average number for acts of athleticism increasing to around two; and the average number of acts of intelligence increased to more than three per comic book. These averages veil other significant factors, however. For example, if one eliminated the particularly brutal *Power Man and Iron Fist* issue #123 of 1986 (which included nineteen acts of brute force), the overall average would be markedly lower than the previous time period. Acts of athleticism would be notably lower if *Falcon* #2, where there are numerous instances of aero-acrobatics, were eliminated. The highest use of intelligence exhibited by a Black character was by Jim Rhodes in *Iron Man* #171, with seven acts where the character displays a deliberative and reflective approach to the superhero business.

From 1989 to 1994 extreme uses of brute force are observed in *Power Man*, *War Machine*, *Tribe*, and *Zwanna*, each with nine acts per comic book. Other Black superheroes in titles such as *Brotherman*, *Green Lantern: Mosaic*, *Hardware*, *Icon*, *Shadowhawk*, and *Static* are very non-violent. Characters like John Stewart (in *Green Lantern: Mosaic*) and *Static* use significant amounts of intelligence, each with more than eight acts apiece in certain issues. *Brotherman*, *Cage*, *Hardware*, *Icon*, and *Night Thrasher* use little intelligence, with a single act apiece for specific issues. *Shadowhawk* and *Tribe* display no intelligence as defined in this study whatsoever. As a consequence, once again the existence of the stereotype is significantly challenged.

Earlier it was suggested that Black superheroes would concern themselves exclusively with threats having relatively narrow consequences, and that Black superheroes would concern themselves with threats targeted against themselves, their family, friends, and neighborhoods. The findings of this study support the first part of the stereotype, but the second tends to change over time. The data indicate that forty-eight out of the sixty-five problems confronted by the characters encompass the categories identified above. Consequently, Black superheroes usually have a relatively narrow focus with regard to the problems they address. Rarely is it the case (like it is with Superman, for example) that the citizens of the universe will owe their safety to the acts of an African American hero. It is more likely that a neighborhood would owe its well-being to the Black character, thus reinforcing the view that Blacks are somewhat inconsequential to anyone but themselves. In the seventeen exceptions to this trend are wide variations. Eight involve kidnaping/hostage crises; six concern moral dilemmas; one involves getting home from another planet; one, keeping a diverse group of beings together on another planet; and one, an international arms dealer.

With regard to the target of these threats, the situation changes dramatically. In the beginning, Black superheroes were generally the primary targets, along with their family, friends, and neighborhoods. As time progressed, however, the targets became more varied. In the second period identified, the targets move from a more personal and neighborhood

focus to address those on a citywide level (e.g., *Power Man and Iron Fist* #53 and #123, *Falcon* #4, *Iron Man* #171 and *Green Lantern* #183). Black characters take part in saving a planet with John Stewart in *Green Lantern* issues #197, #14, and *Green Lantern: Mosaic* #1. In the most recent comic books examined, the largest array of targets emerged. Not only is the number more diverse, but individual characters also vary their focus from issue to issue. For example, in some comic titles the characters will protect themselves or their friends in one issue (such as *Shadowhawk* #9, *Icon* #14, *Static* #1, *Steel* #1 and *War Machine* #1), only to turn in another issue to protecting the city or the globe (*Shadowhawk* #1, *Icon* #1, *Static* #7, *Steel* #4 and *War Machine* #3). The most recent Black superheroes studied confront more problems in more areas, again seriously challenging the stereotype of the narrowly focused Black.

When Black superheroes first emerged, readers were easily able to categorize them by referring to a few commonly held stereotypes. These characters relied on strength and natural athletic ability rather than intelligence, and they tended to fight violent crime in their own neighborhoods. They protected only themselves or their families and friends from wrongdoing. They held low status jobs commonly believed to be occupied by African Americans. Ordinary Blacks within the same comic books tended to use Black English. Over time Black superheroes have become more complex with a greater variety of superpowers, better employment, more articulate characters, a greater balance between acts of brute force, athleticism and intelligence, and an increased concern for threats to individuals not directed towards the character's family, small circle of friends or neighborhood. It appears that a more representative view of the Black community as a whole has been captured within this medium of popular culture.

It is no surprise that Black superheroes began to emerge during the early 1970s, since in the 1950s and 1960s, Blacks received important recognition through the passage and common acceptance of civil rights legislation, and many became more active in numerous aspects of American political, cultural and economic life through the Black power movement. Perhaps inspired by images of the Black power movement and by the successful lobbying of the civil rights organizations, the comic book industry created several Black superheroes. Although these characters were not uniformly positive, some representation was obtained.

From 1983 to 1987, representation significantly improved, capturing examples of the diversity within the African American community. During the most recent period examined, several independent companies released numerous comic books with African American superheroes that sold well. The market had been identified. As a result of the awareness of Black consumers, the larger comic book companies published similar titles, and the number and diversity of Black superheroes increased dramatically and the representation of the characters improved. During this time, more intellectual acts are shown and there is greater variety in superpowers, types of threats, targets of threats, and jobs held by the superhero themselves. Although there was also an increase in the number of threatening panels, athletic acts, and brute force, the general trend could still be viewed as rather positive.

As of late 1994 to the present, the situation for improving Black representations within comics has come to a somewhat depressing stage. Of the comic books in the last period studied, the *Black Panther*, *Power Man*, *Captain Marvel*, *Ebony Warrior*, *Flatbush Native*, *Green Lantern: Mosaic* with John Stewart, *Horus*, *Meteor Man*, *Numidian Force*, *Original Man*, *Purge*, *Sustah-girl*, *Tribe* and *Zwanna* are gone. Most of the independent Black companies that initiated Black characters have either been bought out, lost valuable personnel, or gone bankrupt.[15] From these developments, one can only conclude that the commitment of comic book publishers to diversity was and is of secondary importance to economic concerns. While several African American characters still remain in current comic books, the diversity observable just a year or so is gone, and old characterizations are returning. Ironically, the future of Black superheroes and diverse representations may be determined not by their color, but by the content of their character, the quality of the drawing style, the development of the story line, and the popularity the superhero has with a wider audience. ●

APPENDIX
Comics Surveyed (title, issue, year of publication, publisher)

Black Goliath #2 (1976), #5 (1976). Marvel.
Black Lightning #2 (1977), #6 (1978). DC
Black Panther #22 (1976), #24 (1976). Marvel
Brotherman #1 (1991), #5 (1992). Big City
Brother Voodoo #170 (1973), #171 (1973). Marvel
Cage #1 (1992), #14 (1993). Marvel
Captain America and the Falcon #177 (1974), #191 (1975). Marvel
Captain Marvel #1 (1994). Marvel
Cloak and Dagger #3 (1989), #14 (1990). Marvel

Ebony Warrior #1 (1993). ANIA
The Falcon #2 (1984), #4 (1984). Marvel
Flatbush Native #2 (1993), #3 (1993). Flatline Comicbook Company
Green Lantern #183 (1984), #197 (1985); #14, 3rd series (1991). DC
Green Lantern: Mosaic #1 (1992). DC
Hardware #1 (1993), #11 (1993). Milestone
Hero for Hire #9 (1973), #16 (1973). Marvel.
Horus #1 (1991). ACME
Icon #1 (1993), #14 (1994). Milestone
Iron Man #171 (1983), #190 (1985). Marvel
Meteor Man #2 (1993), #5 (1993). Marvel
Night Thrasher #5 (1993), #12 (1994). Marvel
Nightwatch #1 (1994), #3 (1994). Marvel
Original Man #0 (1992), #1 (1992). Omega7
Power Man #21 (1974), #34 (1976). Marvel
Power Man and Iron Fist #53 (1978), #123 (1986). Marvel
Purge #0 (1993), #1 (1993). ANIA
Shadowhawk #1 (1993), #9 (1993). Image
Static #1 (1993), #7 (1993). Milestone
Steel #1 (1994), #4 (1994). DC
Strike #4 (1987), #5 (1987). Eclipse
Sustah-girl #1 (1993). Onli Studios
Tribe #1 (1993). Image; #3 (1994). Axis
War Machine #1 (1994), #3 (1994). Marvel
X-Men #198 (1985), #220 (1987). Marvel
Zwanna #1 (1993). ANIA

NOTES

1. Charles Hardy and Gail Stern, *Ethnic Images in the Comics* (Philadelphia: Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies, 1986). 13.

2. To stereotype is not simply to classify some individual by certain traits attributed to a larger group as is most often suggested. As defined by Walter Lippman, *Public Opinion* (New York: MacMillan, 1965), 63-64:

> A pattern of stereotypes is not neutral. It is not merely a way of substituting order for the great blooming, buzzing confusion of reality. It is not merely a short cut. It is all of these things and something more. It is the guarantee of our self-respect; it is the projection upon the world of our own sense of our own value, our own position and our own rights. The stereotypes are, therefore, highly charged with the feelings that are attached to them. They are the fortress of our tradition, and behind its defenses we can continue to feel ourselves safe in the position we occupy.

3. Kenneth Braly and David Katz, "Stereotypes of 100 College Students," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 28 (1933): 120-149.

4. Dennis Ogawa, "Small-group Communication Stereotypes of Black Americans," *Journal of Black Studies* 1 (1971): 273-281.

5. Rebecca Leonard and Don Locke, "Communication Stereotypes: Is Interracial Communication Possible?" *Journal of Black Studies* (1993): 332-343.

6. See, for example, Lawrence Reddick "Educational Program for the Improvement of Race Relations in Films, Radio, Press and Libraries," *Journal of Negro Education* 13 (Summer 1944): 9-17; and Allen Woll and Randall Miller, *Ethnic and Racial Images in American Film and Television Since 1948* (New York: 1987).

7. See, for example, Fred Macdonald, *Blacks and White TV: Afro-Americans in Television Since 1948* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1983); and Bishetta Merritt and Carolyn Stroman, "Black Family Imagery and Interactions on Television", *Journal of Black Studies* 23 (1993): 492-499.

8. See, for example, J. David Colfax and Susan Sternberg, "The Persuasion of Racial Stereotypes: Blacks in Mass Circulation Magazine Advertisements," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36 (Spring 1972): 8-18; Robert Douglas, "Black Males and Television: New Images Versus Old Stereotypes," *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 11 (Summer 1987): 69-73; and Jane Dates, *Split Image: African-Americans in the Mass Media* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1990).

9. See Hardy and Stern, *Ethnic Images in the Comics*.

10. Ruth Thibodeau, "From Racism to Tokenism: The Changing Face of Blacks in New Yorker Cartoons," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 53 (1989): 482-494.

11. An alternative would have been to identify Blacks within white comics but given the relatively infrequent presence that Blacks had there this was not considered. The superhero genre is particularly important for two reasons: 1) the amount of money they make each year clearly establishes the popularity of this form of comic book and 2) given the exaggerated nature of superheroes (i.e., their physical form, abilities, and the situations that they are put within), the genre most clearly presents an opportunity for abusing stereotypical characterizations.

12. Comparatively, it is very difficult to identify how many white characters there are.

13. There are also Black members in *Armorines*, *Harbinger*, *Stormwatch*, *Psi-Force*, the *Suicide Squad*, *New Mutants*, *New Teen Titans*, *Avengers*, *Batman and the Outsiders*, *Shadow Cabinet*, *Nightstalkers*, *Youngblood*, *Harlem Heroes* and *Bloodstryke*. I have not included these, however, for the Black characters are not featured often enough to provide sufficient information about them.

14. Most notable about the last two characters is the fact that they replace important white characters amidst some controversy. Jim Rhodes steps into the iron armor because Tony Stark is an alcoholic and can no longer take the pressure. John Stewart becomes ring-bearer after the Guardians decide that he is more worthy than Hal Jordan. In both cases, the white characters do not go away. In fact, one of the primary elements of these stories is the struggle between the white and Black characters to determine who is in charge, in addition to the inner struggle of the Black characters to deal with their inferiority complexes. Both of these battles are fought as they are trying to save people and defend truth, justice and one another.

15. See *Comics Journal* 160 for a good discussion of this phenomenon. Interestingly the trend mirrored the demographics of Black television shows and films during the same time.

emanata

Mort Walker in his **Lexicon of Comicana** *invented the term "emanata" to describe the graphic devices used by cartoonists to describe "what is going on inside" their characters. This occasional feature of* **Inks** *is intended to provide an opportunity for commentary, anecdotes of interest, and historical sketches. Readers interested in writing such a feature are invited to contact the editor.*

Kate Salley Palmer: A Profile

by Lucy Rollin

When I came to South Carolina in 1983, I was out of the habit of looking at editorial cartoons, having found them uninteresting in the newspapers I usually read. But soon, instead of opening the *Greenville News* to the comic strip page, I looked first at the editorial cartoon to see what Kate Salley Palmer thought and how she was going to make me laugh as well as think. I asked my husband, who had lived here for a while, who this Kate Salley Palmer was. He said, "One of our local treasures." Later, at a neighborhood outdoor fest as we stood listening to a three-piece country music band called "Cow in a Ditch," my husband nudged me and said, "The singer is Kate Salley Palmer." I was as thrilled as if he had said Barbra Streisand. This short woman with cropped blond hair, ruddy complexion, and a South Carolina drawl had become one of my heroes—a national treasure as well as a local one. But not long afterward, her cartoons disappeared from the paper. For years I have wondered what happened.

Someone recently called her "South Carolina's Molly Ivins," because of all the things they will not let her say in the state's newspapers.[1]

Kate Salley Palmer in 1991.

She calls herself a "Sixties refugee," and says that, after years of failing at a variety of occupations, political commentary is really the only thing she can do. But right now she is out of a job. As one of the tiny number of professional political cartoonists in the country, Kate Salley Palmer is in many ways typical. A recent article by Steve Greenberg for the newsletter of the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists (AAEC) called attention to the number of cartoonists out of work, pointing out that "these jobs

Kate Salley Palmer © 7/15
GREENVILLE PIEDMONT
NEWS America Syndicate
BACK ALLEY ABORTIONS Inc.
OPEN 24 HOURS
...WHEN YOU'D RATHER BE DEAD THAN PREGNANT....
...WE TOLD YOU TO COME ALONE, SWEETHEART... WHO'S THE WIERD GUY ON THE '60'S TRIP?
RING BELL, → GIVE PASSWORD SKULK INSIDE TAKE A NUMBER
... CONSIDER, IF YOU WILL,... THE CASE OF ED MEESE.... U.S. ATTORNEY GENERAL DEDICATED TO RETURNING ABORTION TO THE BACK STREETS...
A MAN WHO, ONE SEEMINGLY ORDINARY MORNING,....
....FINDS HIMSELF TRANSFORMED INTO A CHUNKY, DESPERATE, PREGNANT TEENAGE GIRL...
A FORM OF JUSTICE FOUND ONLY IN... THE TWILIGHT ZONE!

"This cartoon must have been in response to a specific pronouncement of Meese's, or in answer to the proposition that access to abortion rights be limited by the states."

exist largely at the whim of a very small number of individuals at a paper."[2] He offered advice about maintaining freelance work, a flexible attitude about job possibilities, and a healthy savings account—all of which Kate has done several times over. However, as one of a minuscule number of female political cartoonists (in 1989 only four of the 240 active members of the AAEC were women), her career has been less typical.

Kate Palmer lives in a smallish two-story house at the end of a long, hilly road on the outskirts of Clemson—in what even by Clemson standards we would call "the boonies." A basketball court adjoins the house and lights decorate the trees in the yard, suggesting that some good parties are held there. Out back is a framed-in cottage which she and her husband are building together. It will become a tool shed when the space above the garage becomes Kate's studio. Right now her dining room is her office, holding an impressive computer system and piles of books and papers stacked in every available space. Her screen-saver whirs away with a program called "The Screen's New High—Naked Screaming Terror!" showing scenes from the *Creature from the Black Lagoon* and a man being attacked by a giant crab.

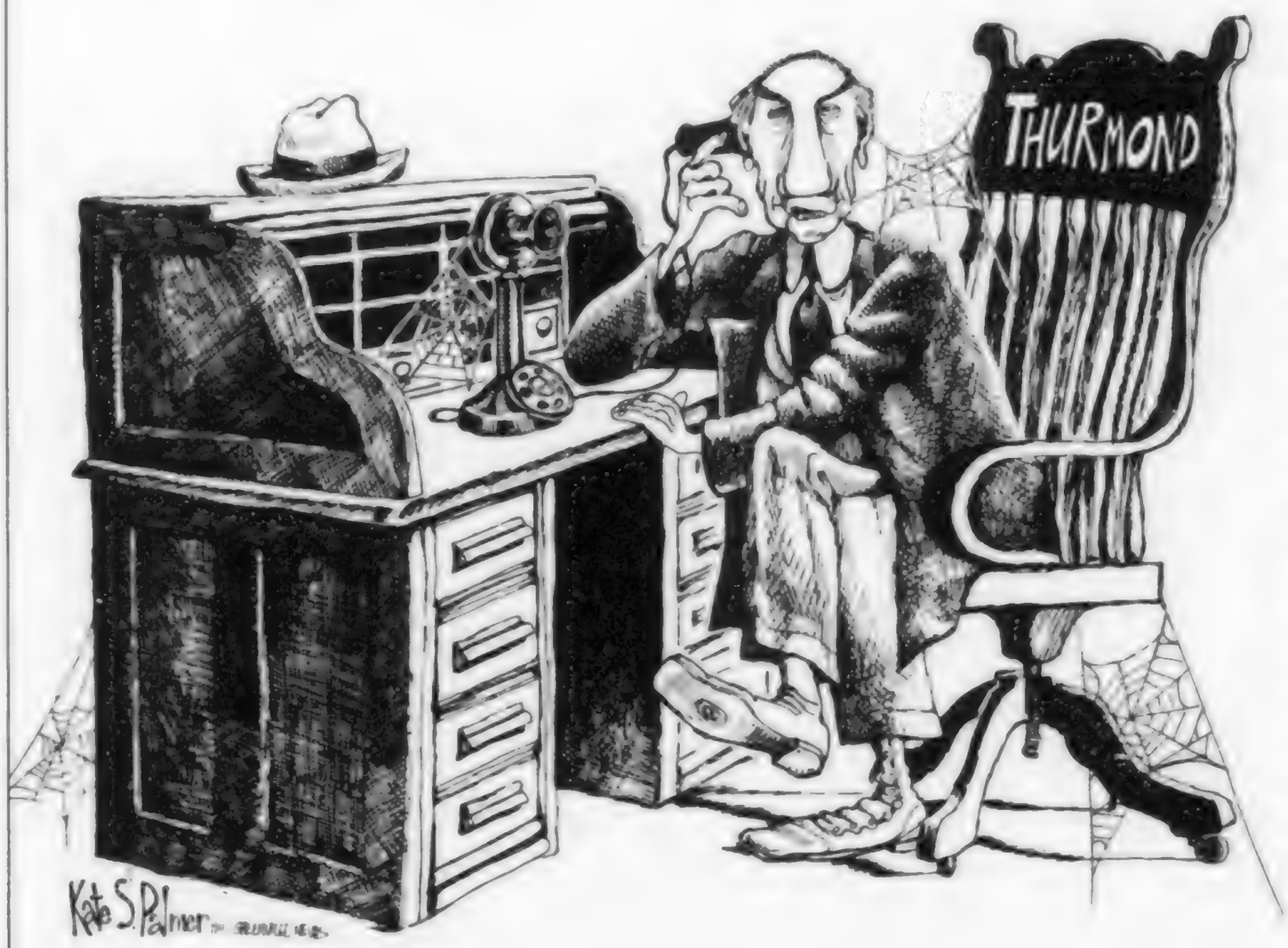
While I visit, the large-screen TV in the living room is on but silent. She is taping a news show, where she will look for faces in the news to include in her new fax caricature service. Such shows also help her keep up with issues, and, as she puts it, figure out what she thinks. "Because you've really got to absorb a lot of information to figure out what you think, unless you want others to do your thinking for you—and there are plenty of people who would be happy to do it for you." As we pass through the dining room, she shows me her two latest projects: the caricature fax service, and her autobiography. This last is the idea of her new agent ("third one, and first one with a sense of humor") who wants her to accompany the book with a retrospective of her cartoons.

"My career as a political cartoonist is over; it's behind me," she says, without particular sadness. But it is hard to imagine her not doing it. Like all successful editorial cartoonists, she has a quirky sense of humor, an ability to translate the verbal into the visu-

al, and a passionate, often angry response to all kinds of injustices. She got riled again last year when her idea of a daily cartoon service by fax (in which she had invested a year's time, money, and training) got pre-empted by the Tribune Media Services, which announced it was offering cartoons by "several popular Pulitzer Prize winners" for about $6 a week. "Are Jeff MacNelly, Mike Peters, et al, just trying to suck up all the money?" she wrote indignantly to the AAEC. "How much do they need, for God's sake? Why isn't world wide syndication of his political cartoons; a cartoon strip; and a single-panel feature (which his readers write for him) enough for Jeff?"[3] It looked to her as if this group (at the time she called them "money-grubbing weasels") would soon be the only cartoonists working. But she is counterattacking with her fax caricature service, for which she now has twelve subscribers. For a few minutes, she shuts off her "naked screaming terror" screen saver and demonstrates how the computer graphics work. Her computer mouse technique as she tries to get Michael Jordan's head right is as skilled as her technique with a pen.

Since childhood Kate has been that peculiar amalgam of clown, poet, historian, artist, and dreamer that C. D. Batchelor thought made up a political cartoonist.[4] She was the class joker and never much good at schoolwork. All of her grade school teachers said she day-dreamed too much, but, as she says, "Have you ever tried to stop day-dreaming?" The only way she passed high school Latin was that the teacher let her draw a mural of the fall of Rome in the back of the room: "It took weeks, and kept me from distracting the rest of the class, which I think was Mrs. Higginbotham's real reason." As a student at the University of South Carolina she got a preview of her later life as a political cartoonist. In biology class she sat next to the editor of the school paper, who observed her drawing cartoons instead of taking notes. The editor recruited Kate on the spot to draw a weekly comic strip for the paper. Kate had never tried a strip, but invented *Terrible Tom and the Boys*, Tom being the name of the school's president and the "boys" a group of superhero types who battled with Tom. "Those were the days of civil rights and Viet Nam. My strip dealt with parking tickets and whether women would be allowed to wear pants outside the dormitory, which shows you how deeply into the issues I was at that time." She was soon famous on campus, but nobody knew what she looked like. "Even though I signed my name to the strip, everybody thought I was a boy. Once I was taking one of the strips up to the office, and a boy on the elevator said, 'Oh, do you know the guy that does those?' I said, 'I'm the one that does them.' He looked blank and said, 'A . . . girl?' and just got off the elevator." At commencement she was presented with a special award of appreciation for the strip, for "easing the tensions between students and administration," something she did not even know she was doing at the time.

"I like to call this 'Strom Thurmond on the campaign trail '78!' During his 1978 Senate race against Pug Ravenel, Ravenel campaigned all over the State tirelessly. He showed up anywhere there was a hint of a crowd. Thurmond sat in his office and ignored all efforts to smoke him out. It was during this campaign when, in answer to the age issue, Thurmond promised this would be his 'last term in the Senate.' "



After graduation she found occasional work on a small rural newspaper in the Clemson area, and in 1975 the assistant editor of the *Greenville News* began paying her $5 per cartoon for free-lance cartooning. She just "flooded them with cartoons, until finally they decided I needed to start coming over there so they could have more control over what I said. The paper was big-time anti-ERA, anti-feminist, so every time I did a feminist cartoon I had to pay for it—I didn't get to do another one for a long time. They'd say, that's a fine cartoon, but cool it on the feminist cartoons for now! Do something local." But her editors believed it was good to have conflicting views on the editorial page, so she had a lot of freedom then—even freedom to fight with the editor. "I was famous for hissy fits. But the interesting thing was, the editor would let me scream and yell and have my hissy fit, then he would have his hissy fit, and then

we would go out to lunch together." The editors never lost confidence in her or lost an opportunity to tell her they thought she was as good as anybody in the business. In this kind of working relationship, she came away with her confidence in herself intact.

She became aware that she was nationally known when in 1976 she joined the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists. At her first meeting, she and Etta Hulme were the only women there, with 150 men; and her husband Jim was the only male member of the "women's auxiliary." But she traded cartoons with the likes of Tony Auth and Draper Hill. "When Mike Peters met me, he said 'Oh, a woman cartoonist!' and he grabbed me and took me over to Herblock and said, 'Look, Herblock, a woman cartoonist!' That was really the first time I thought it might be unusual to be a woman cartoonist." She soon found that it was not only unusual but difficult. At AAEC meetings, there were times when she felt accepted. Sometimes she would be down in the bar with the men at 3 a.m. while their spouses were in bed, and her husband would get together with the wives and complain. But eventually she became the only one at these meetings with young children, and at home she noticed that her two children were the first latchkey children in Clemson. "I didn't fit in with the mothers in town and I didn't fit in with the guys at work." Living in a small Southern town tended to further separate her from other cartoonists, and even being married made her different. "Those guys who were making it big tended to be unmarried or divorced, and childless. I got to wondering whether, if a married man with kids can't make it big, what chance is there for a married woman with kids?"

In 1980 the editorship of the *Greenville News* changed. Like many other editors, she says, her new editor "couldn't read pictures," and she found working with him increasingly difficult. "For some reason, they have word people editing picture people in this business, and it doesn't work." Like some other editors, he prided himself on never watching television, so when she did a cartoon using a popular tv reference, the editor simply did not get it. This was also the beginning of the paper's increasing political conservatism. "They loved Nixon. The whole Watergate business upset them badly. They hated Carter, which was all right with me because I could do anti-Carter cartoons, but it became increasingly difficult for me to do the work I wanted to do." If her politics had been acceptable, she might have been allowed to work, she thinks. Instead, she was told she was "not a good sport."

In 1981 William A. Henry III complained in the *Washington Journalism Review* that the "new car-

"With the 1980 elections, Thurmond became chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee. Suddenly, certain civil rights that had been taken for granted were up for reexamination, such as the Voting Rights Act. Amazingly, Thurmond did not follow through on his threats to abolish this act, but certain groups of black activists weren't satisfied. They insisted that the election runoff system as it existed in Southern states was unfair to minorities and should be abolished as well."

Kate Salley Palmer © 1/27/96
SORRY ABOUT THAT NEW JUSTICE... OBVIOUSLY, SHE'S NOT ONE OF US...
STATE SENATE
STATE SUPREME COURT
JEAN TOAL

"Jean Toal was the first woman ever elected to the South Carolina Supreme Court. She was elected by the Good Ole Boy legislature, where she had served with great distinction for many years. She was such an obvious choice for the post that not to vote for her would have been to brand oneself as a porker forever. The fact that the two pigs are commiserating that she's 'not one of us' is, of course, a compliment to Toal."

toonists," the "MacNelly clones," depended too much on jokes and not enough on substance.[5] He lumped Kate in with this group (while locating her paper in Greens*boro, North* Carolina instead of Green*ville, South* Carolina), and she says, "This really hurt. At this time I was fighting daily to do cartoons that were hard-hitting as well. I don't apologize for my cartoons being funny, but I would dispute the charge that they didn't say anything."

The cartoon that raised the most ruckus in this Southern town was not, on the surface, a political cartoon. A couple of days after John Belushi's death, before the cause of it was officially published, she did a cartoon showing Belushi as the Samurai, approaching the pearly gates. Saint Peter was saying, "Go right in. The Old Man has a sense of humor." Outraged readers attacked it because it showed a drug user going to heaven, because she referred to God as an "old man," and because—she swears this is true—it said God has a sense of humor. In 1984 Kate left the *News* and for a couple of years relied on syndication, which she had already established in 1981 with Field Newspaper Syndicate (later North America Syndicate). By 1986 she was no longer doing editorial cartoon work and turned instead to writing and illustrating children's books.

She misses the newspaper business. She has had to educate herself on the computer because she no longer has that support system. More importantly, she misses the friendships, the camaraderie, and "being in on things." She especially remembers covering a Reagan speech at a Greenville restaurant in 1980, before he got the nomination. It was Reagan's birthday, and they wheeled out a big birthday cake. "When he leaned over to blow out the candles, he fell into the cake. I was standing behind the secret service who were standing behind Reagan. He took his jacket off and handed it to me—because the secret service wasn't going to take it—and I gave it to a waiter who said he would have it cleaned. Next thing I knew, Nancy Reagan is asking me, 'Where is his jacket?' I told her, and she got really upset and said, 'His index cards are in the pocket!' The reporters started laughing, saying 'He ought to know the speech by now. He's given it eighty times.' Reagan was totally unconcerned, but Nancy was bats. She didn't eat a mouthful. Finally someone came back with the index cards and he gave the speech, same speech he'd given everywhere he went."

But she does not see herself getting back into the business. She is not interested in moving from Clemson, and the business itself has changed. Political cartoons are all starting to look alike, she thinks. Everybody wants to imitate the style of Oliphant or MacNelly. And political commentary has changed. The press now tends to represent popular opinion, and since Watergate, the Office of the President is less respected. "When Herblock did a cartoon of Nixon crawling out of a sewer, it was considered shocking. Nowadays people do a lot worse than that and don't even think about it. There is a kind of one-upsmanship of insult going on. And there are those who take the opposite view just because it's contrary to do so, and I think that's wrong too." Like many of her colleagues in the business, she resents the 1987 Pulitzer for editorial cartooning going to Berke Breathed for his *Bloom County* comic strip. "He didn't have to play by the same rules. He didn't have to run his strip by the

OKAY,...HERE IT IS, 1996... AND THE COUNTRY HASN'T BEEN WORSE OFF SINCE THE END OF WORLD WAR TWO... WHOSE FAULT IS THAT?
OLD PRESIDENT'S HOME
ASSOCIATED FEATURES
©Kate Salley Palmer

"I did 'The Old President's Home' during the 1988 Presidential campaign, when George Bush was pretty sure to get elected. I figured that, no matter how badly things went for the country under his watch, the only person who would get the blame was the last Democratic President, Jimmy Carter. This was before the rebirth of Carter as Peacemaker and Envoy to Troubled Lands."

editors every day, like we do. We end up censoring ourselves just to get cartoons approved. He didn't have to do that."

If political cartoons cause editors so many headaches, why do newspapers run them? "I don't know. Maybe newspapers run them because they help people express what they already think." Why do cartoonists do them? "I know why cartoonists do them. We do them to make ourselves feel better. We use humor to try to deal with the things in the world we can't handle. We're very sensitive people, even though we may not seem like it, and we use humor to console ourselves. We do it to save ourselves, just as writers write. When you look at the work of a really good cartoonist, you learn more—or just as much—about the cartoonist than you do about the politics of the time."

One of my favorite Kate Palmer cartoons, drawn in 1985, shows Rod Serling introducing "a form of justice found only in the Twilight Zone!" It is Ed Meese, Reagan's virulently anti-abortion Attorney General, as a "chunky, desperate, pregnant teenage girl," trying to get a back-alley abortion. Although this was dead-on for the politics of 1985, it is still a perfect example of Kate's style: instantly recognizable popular motifs coupled with a certain poignancy in her idea and in her caricatures. She has—with equal poignancy—recently caricatured herself as unemployed, wearing an old bathrobe, watching "Wheel of Fortune" and stuffing herself with snacks. With an eye at once innocent and shrewd, Kate continues to save herself, just as she saved South Carolina readers in the early eighties who laughed at her cartoons, and learned something, too. The small world of editorial cartoonists could use her now. ●

NOTES

1. Kate Salley Palmer's comments are transcribed from an interview with the author on 9 July 1996, in Clemson, South Carolina. Her cartoons are reprinted with her permission.

2. Steve Greenberg, "Dumped," *AAEC Notebook*, Winter 1988, 4-5.

3. Kate Palmer, "Stop Sucking Up All the Money," *AAEC Notebook*, Spring 1995, 5.

4. Quoted in Steven Hess and Milton Kaplan, *The Ungentlemanly Art* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), 173.

5. William A. Henry III, "The Sit-Down Comics," *Washington Journalism Review*, October 1981, 22-28.

resources

Stripper's Guide to U. S. Comic Strips and Cartoon Panels

by Allan Holtz

A great barrier to the appreciation and understanding of comic strip history is the lack of a standard inclusive reference work. Many currently available titles cover only well-known features, and editorializing sometimes substitutes for research. When the researcher or fan searches for facts, the hunt may require reference to a dozen books, often resulting in discovery of contradictory data, or in the case of less popular features, no information at all.

The creation of a comprehensive reference work on U. S. comic strips and cartoon panels is a daunting task. Many of the primary sources no longer exist, and the remainder comprise a huge body of material. The author estimates that primary source material exists for a minimum of ten thousand different newspaper comic strips and cartoon panel titles. The total number may be as high as thirty thousand. The creation of a reference work to document such a vast body of material is a time-consuming project, and thus most researchers have quite reasonably shied away from it. Several have published listings based on the *Editor & Publisher Annual Syndicate Directories*, a more manageable subset of the project. Unfortunately, the *Editor & Publisher* listings are sometimes vague, incomplete, and erroneous, thus references based on them fall short of being definitive.

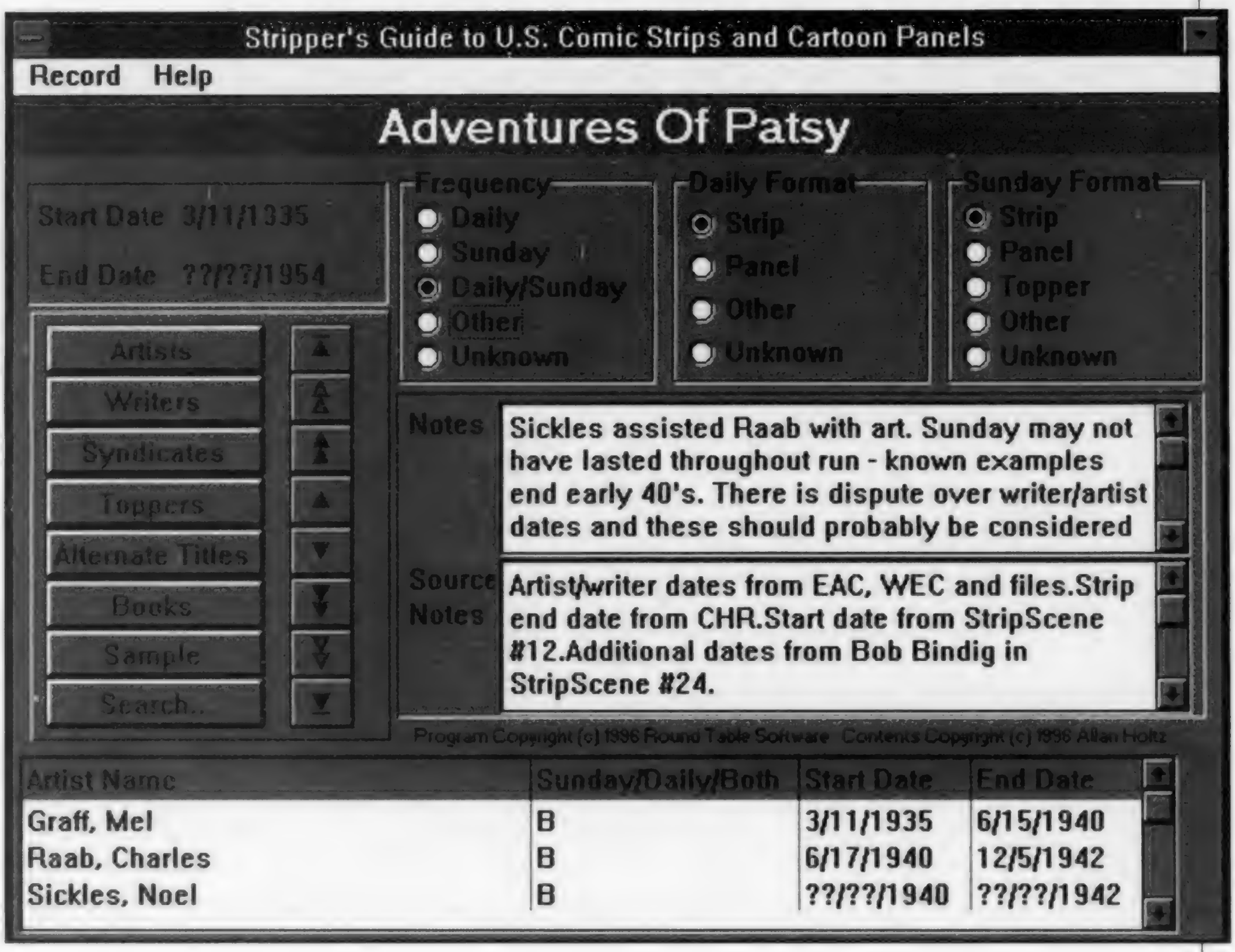
The Stripper's Guide to U.S. Comic Strips and Cartoon Panels, a quarterly publication available by subscription, is an attempt to provide a comprehensive reference to the history of newspaper comic strips and panels. Each issue of *Stripper's Guide* contains listings for several hundred features in alphabetic order by title with the following information:

- Strip Title
- Begin/End Date
- Feature Format (strip or panel)
- Frequency (daily, Sunday, etc.)
- Syndicates, including begin/end dates
- Artists and writers, including begin/end dates
- Alternate titles
- Toppers
- Reprint Books
- Information Sources
- Notes

Additional components such as plot outlines, graphic samples of the features, and short biographies of creators are under consideration, but are not yet implemented.

The philosophy guiding this project diverges from other similar works attempted in the past. Due to the author's distrust of secondary sources, no comic strip or cartoon panel is listed without evidence that it was indeed published. This may seem a minor point, but an unsuspecting researcher can invent a phantom feature for a variety of reasons: the *Editor & Publisher Annual Syndicate* Directory lists strips that never actually ran due to poor sales; original art for unpublished features may find its way onto the market and be sold under the feature's title; or creators, when interviewed in their dotage, may misstate their accomplishments. Thus no feature is listed in *Stripper's Guide* without proof of publication, whether in the form of tear sheets personally inspected by the author or substantial evidence from multiple unrelated sources.

It is an unfortunate but nonetheless certain fact that this index cannot be absolutely complete. For this reason, one of the more important components of the index is the documentation of information sources. The origin of each piece of information in the listing, whether from primary research, a reference book or article, contemporary accounts, etc., is noted.



Sample screen from *Stripper's Guide* electronic edition

This not only gives future researchers direction for seeking additional information, but also allows the reader to judge the relative merit of the data presented. A start date determined from syndicate proofs, for instance, is more trustworthy than a date found in a reference book.

Stripper's Guide is published on a quarterly basis, and covers at least one letter of the alphabet in each issue (as of this writing the letter E is the last published). In addition, many corrections and enhancements to previously published data are included with each issue, and the typical installment runs approximately fifty pages. The data are also available in computerized form, as a simple, user-friendly Microsoft Windows program with which features can be located based on various search criteria. *Stripper's Guide* is a not-for-profit project with subscription rates intended only to cover costs.

Data submissions by collectors, fans and researchers are an integral part of this project. While the author attempts to draw from as many sources as possible given limited time and finances, other researchers around the country have at their fingertips additional valuable resources in the form of personal collections, local library collections, and newspaper archives. In order to encourage the submission of new information, the author offers compensation for postage costs and recognition for contributions in the index. Persons interested in contributing to this project are invited to contact the author.

Annual quarterly subscriptions to *Stripper's Guide to U.S. Comic Strips and Cartoon Panels* are available in either printed or computerized versions. The printed version is $25 USD per year. The electronic edition is $20 USD per year and runs on Windows versions 3.1 and greater. Credit card and check orders are accepted. For additional information, contact Allan Holtz, 270 Orange Terrace, Winter Park, FL 32789-3561; e-mail 73514.3426@compuserve.com; or call (407) 740-7860. Please inquire for international orders. ●

book reviews

The Work of Charles Samuel Keene

by Simon Houfe

Reviewed by Shelley Armitage

The work of this prodigious *Punch* artist certainly has been studied before, but perhaps nowhere so energetically and emphatically as in this book. Simon Houfe collaborated with Michael Broadbent of Christie's on a centenary Keene exhibition in 1986. As a former staff member of the Victoria and Albert Museum in the 1960s, Houfe had developed a passion for Keene's work there. The result was a comprehensive exhibition mounted at Christie's beginning in December 1990, for which he wrote the catalogue as well as helped in the selection of work to be included. Despite the success of the London exhibit and the smaller Broadbent Collection shown at Ipswich, including extensive coverage by the art press, Houfe believed that Keene's life and work warranted a longer, more considered treatment. *The Work of Charles Samuel Keene* is this work.

Houfe's study follows other specialized studies. *Life and Letters of Charles Keene of 'Punch'* by historian of Victorian illustration, George Somes Layard, was the first in 1892. In 1897 Joseph Pennell produced a large folio *The Work of Charles Keene* which displays Keene's master draftsmanship. Both these books appeared within six years of Keene's death in 1896, indicating his reputation among his colleagues and within the London art world of the time. In 1903 M. H. Spielmann published the complete etched work; and in 1934 Sir Lionel Lindsay's *Charles Keene: The Artists' Artist* appeared. Keene went out of fashion, however, after two more books appeared in the 1930s. The most recent scholarly study was Derek Hudson's *Charles Keene* (1947), with many new topics, including a professional analysis of his technique and style. Houfe's book follows a renewed interest in the 1980s in Victorian illustration due to the increased awareness at that time of the relationship between British illustration and European art traditions. Through these periods, collectors and dealers have been active, despite the dearth of critical appreciation for Keene.

Houfe's book, though modest by scholarly standards, occupies an important niche in Keene studies, for it not only brings his work to our attention again, but argues for the first time for a deeper understanding of the connection between the artist, the influence of Pre-Raphaelite art, his work for the comic periodical, *Punch*, and his ultimate place in the world of art. Because Houfe primarily is interested in Keene as an artist, he chose to omit many of the humorous captions which originally appeared below the drawings, focusing attention on the art itself.

Houfe's decision may seem once more to suggest that to most art critics comic art is trivial; therefore, it is not surprising that Houfe would ignore or play down that aspect of Keene's ouvre. In the chapter, "Observer or Humorist," the author argues that Keene benignly participated in the editorial brainstorming that went on perfunctorily among *Punch* contributors and that he passively accepted legends and suggestions for drawings. Houfe's argument might appear lame if one were only to reflect on Keene's own eccentric and garreted existence, a long history of witty letter-writing, and the fact that he worked for *Punch* for some forty years. However, because Houfe analyzes convincingly in this chapter Keene's consistent, life-long interest in illustration, Keene's work seems all the more interesting when we realize how it could be used, read, and seen in various ways, depending on the place of publication.

What Houfe does demonstrate is Keene's excellence as a draftsman, his recognition by artists of his time,

Charles Keene, self-portrait with a fellow artist to his left, *c.* 1860.

including George de Maurier and Malais. To this end, the organization of the book, moving from the artist's background to his influence by the Pre-Raphaelites to his work for *Punch* and his reputation as an artist, allows the reader to realize the cultural and artistic factors which influenced and affected Keene's development into a mature illustrator. Houfe accomplishes in this rather brief book a real sense of the times, techniques, training, and the opportunities which existed for an illustrator.

In the beginning chapter, "The Background of an Artist," Houfe reminds us that Suffolk, where Keene enjoyed retreats throughout his life, was home to the likes of Gainsborough, Constable, Churchyard, E. R. Smythe and John Moore—landscapists who captured the sweeping farmlands and vast skies of the area. Growing up in a bookish household full of antiquities, Keene's interests were always with cities and people, yet as Houfe astutely observes: "he was a masterly landscapist and above all a painter of natural things." (3) His concern with naturalness translated itself into work of a heightened reality which these earlier artists might have captured in a woodland. Houfe provides much personal yet interpretative data to give the reader a sense of the harbor that was Keene's family life—his widowed mother providing support and a home while the young boy began to draw figure subjects based on history and romance. His early formal art training was with the Whymper Brothers who were outstanding wood engravers in the vanguard of the new illustrated press. Keene's years at the repetitive work as wood engraver helped make him a great craftsman, which served him later as he developed into a real artist.

In 1853-54, Mrs. Keene moved to the White Cottage on the edge of Hammersmith. Keene's drawing for the next several years focused on this locale as he used his mother and sisters for models and was able to observe objects intensely. Thus the years from 1853-1868 were not only among his happiest, but also were some of the most productive. Houfe declares that in those two decades he achieved a mastery of draftsmanship "undreamed of" in the 1840s. Since this was the same time he established himself as a *Punch* artist, he was well-known among his fellow artists and exhibited the strong influence of the Pre-Raphaelites on his work as well as his knowledge of European trends in the arts. From these variety of influences, Keene evolved into a social artist who, like Baudelaire, was interested in the heroism of modern, vernacular life. Perhaps Keene's chief accomplishment emerged from his daily experiences and commissions during this period: the fidelity to

details in studies of individuals yet his ability to portray them faithfully and at home in their particular environments. Keene remained a bachelor throughout his life so that his occasional forays with friends to city or country always resulted in artistic excursions, the subjects of which made their way into his work.

As a brilliant illustrator his rather reclusive nature hampered his commercial success and though regarded by other artists and well-known among them, he was passed over by publishers for some of the major book assignments one would expect to come his way. His wood-engraver, Swain, one of the leading engravers of the time, indicated the difficulty of rendering Keene's subtleties and range into publication. One of the interesting points Houfe makes concerns the necessarily reductive quality of published illustrations. Keene's shadings and effects were essentially lost to the printer's ink. He had a fondness, for example, for greyish inks and experimented with paper types, rejecting commercial stock. Anyone interested in the real Keene should look at the originals or at least at the later published work which was rendered through photographing the drawing and thus was more faithful to Keene's eye and technique.

Though only a single chapter in Houfe's book focuses on Keene's work for *Punch* magazine and even there only in connection to his primary success as an illustrator, the reader still comes away having a sense of an urbane if eccentric, witty if retiring artist who chose to observe from a distance, but whose letters and reported exchanges reveal a warm humor. The author makes the important point that so great was the subtlety of Keene's drawings that he could be no satirist or caricaturist, and indeed the few times he tried the latter he failed. But his comic work, and surely the work which depicts the eccentricities of daily Thames life, is close in its tone to other artists whose work was used for comic illustration. In many ways Keene's little ironies are much deeper and perhaps more lasting than highly topical, broadly satiric or political periodical work of his times. As Houfe shows, though indirectly, illustrators such as Keene contributed much to the history and evolution of comic art precisely because they were first committed to their art. The reader will enjoy looking at the seventy illustrations in this book for various reasons, but for comics and humor scholars these drawings confirm again how delicate and far-ranging the humor may be when the subjects are themselves allowed to display it.

Houfe's book is a nice addition to any collection on the history of art, illustration, and comic art and is a fine contribution to bio-critical studies in these areas. ●

Houfe, Simon. *The Work of Charles Samuel Keene*. Aldershot, Hampshire, England; Scolar Press. 1995. xi, 113 p. 70 illus. index. bibl. ISBN 0-85967-986-1 hbk. $76.95. [distributed in the United States by Ashgate Publishing Co., Brookfield, VT]

La Bande dessinée au Québec

By Mira Falardeau
Reviewed by Bruce Barber

The past ten years have witnessed an increase in publications about comic and cartoon art in Canada, the result of an invigorated academic interest in popular culture generally, new public institutions exhibiting cartoon and comic art, and the expansion of research in communications media and humor. A focus for some of this research has become the exploration of national and individual subject identities, regional, topical or ethnic variation in cartoons, and comic imagery. While less academic and sociological than some of the other recent French and English language books on Canadian cartoons (see, for example, Raymond Morris's 1989 book *Behind the Jester's Mask*, an analysis of Canadian editorial cartoons from 1960 to 1979), Mira Falardeau's *La Bande dessinée au Québec* represents a useful if somewhat abbreviated guide to the history of the comic strip in the province of Québec from the eighteenth century to the present

With reference to their models in England, Europe, and the U.S., Falardeau's book traces the development of single panel cartoons and caricatures in the early illustrated magazines of French Canada, newspaper comic strips, and contemporary comics and zines from the alternative press. Although the sheer breadth of the historical periods, number of artists, and variety of work covered in this slim 125 page book is somewhat problematic for any in-depth understanding of Québec comic and cartoon art, *La Bande dessinée au Québec* represents a useful complement to earlier studies of Québec cartoon and comic art by Gilles Thibault (1973) and Andre Carpentier *et al.* (1975)

Falardeau's introduction documents the growing popularity of comic and cartoon art in French Canada and the development over the past century of a regional form which she argues is distinct from the models available in English Canada, Europe, and the United States. The book's first two chapters trace the origins of cartoon and comic art in Québec and introduce the reader to the pioneers of the popular and alternative presses in French Canada, including *La Gazette du Commerce et*

Literraire pour la ville district de Montreal, the first unilingual French magazine in North America and the enormously successful *Le Canard* (1877-1957). The book also partially documents the work of several illustrators who made a significant contribution to the history of graphic humor in Québec such as John George Hochstetter, the illustrator for *La Gazette de Québec, Le Magasin de Québec* and *le Québec Almanach*, and William Augustus Leggo, an illustrator for *Le Journal de Québec*. Like its namesake in France, the *Canadian Charivari* (renamed simply *Charivari* in 1868) contained political chronicles, social criticism, songs, humorous texts, satires, and caricatures. The first original humor journal in Québec was *La Scie* (*The Saw*) published by L. P. Normand and illustrated by the sculptor John Baptiste Cote. *La Scie* contained the first Québec French language example of multi-panel serial comics. The author notes in passing the first appearance of photographs in *Le Soleil, La Press*, and the *Star* at the turn of the century, and acknowledges the benefits which Québec-based artists obtained from a refinement in reproduction of their drawings. Falardeau underscores the fact that many of the illustrators worked for several magazines and newspapers and notes that Henri Julien of the *Star* and *La Presse's* Raoul Barré became very popular with their readers.

While Falardeau attempts throughout this book to distinguish differences between the work of Québec artists, she acknowledges specific instances of formal influence from the U.S. and European comic models including the introduction of speech balloons and thought bubbles, movement lines, and onomatopoeia; from the French and Belgian examples, a love for storytelling; and from the German and English examples, the tendency to produce what she calls "satirical diatribes." (27) Falardeau argues that three specific genres can be distinguished in early Québec comics: conflict, humor, and adventure. The first type is represented by Alberic Bourgeois, who began his career in the United States drawing social and political satires for the *Boston Post*. Like Outcault with the Yellow Kid, Bourgeois entranced a generation of French Canadians with his *Adventures of Timothée* (1904-1908), *la Famille Citrouillard* (1904-1906), and *Les Adventures de Toinon* (1905-1908). Falardeau notes that Outcault's work, particularly *Buster Brown*, inspired Bourgeois's *le Petit Toinon*, but the publication of U.S. syndicated comic strips in Canadian newspapers and magazines, described on page 32 as "the great American invasion," soon began to have negative effects on indigenous production. In Québec and in Canada as a whole, U.S. comic strips dominated the market from the 1920s on, a situation which the author notes created "a quasi-monopoly which continued until 1994." (33)

Serge Gaboury, *Croc*, 1988.

The author cites the decade from 1930 to 1940 as a formative period as a result of the publication of a weekly illustrated comic supplement by many daily newspapers. The work of caricaturists Maurice Hébert, Robert LaPalme, René Marcoux, and Arthur Lemay was especially important at this time. Falardeau argues the important role of local and regional weeklies in allocating space to Québec artists since syndicated U.S. comics controlled the space available in the mass circulation dailies. The weeklies published many Québec artists including Albert Chartier, popular for his *Onéisme*. Another weekly journal offered *Tipit, le chétif* by Eddy Prévost and *Casimir* by Tom Lucas.

Following the lead of Tod Gitlin and other historians of the 1960s, Falardeau acknowledges in Chapter 3 the important counterculture influence of Harvey Kurtzman's *MAD* magazine. A much more pervasive influence upon the development of what she calls the "spring of Québec comics" (43) was the so-called "quiet revolution" encouraged by the liberalism of leader Jean Lesage which encouraged the secularization of Québec society. Liberalization of the media included an upsurge of interest in the comic strip and other forms of popular culture. Falardeau makes a good case for the use of indigenous French language comics as a bulwark against cultural colonization. It is perhaps no accident that many of Québec's most celebrated contemporary comic artists, baby boomers Serge Gaboury, Lucy Faniel (*Croc*); Réal Godbout (*L'Hydrocephalie illustre*); Rémy Simard, André Montpetit, Philippe Cote, Mario Malouin (*Safarir*); and Caroline Merola (*Ma Météor bleue*) were all nurtured in this period of great cultural change.

In Chapter 4 Falardeau examines the tremendous growth in Québec comic and cartoon art throughout the past two decades with a useful table of exhibitions, festivals and other key events from 1971 to 1993. She identifies Robert LaPalme as a key figure in the development of Québec comic art, particularly as a result of his

founding in 1964 of Le Salon International de la Caricature and his direction of the Montreal Expo '67 Pavilion of Humor. It could be argued that Robert LaPalme's efforts led directly to an increase in interest in indigenous visual humor among Québecers, setting the stage for more recent developments which have included the founding of comic art societies and in 1975 the organization of the first Montreal International Festival of Comic Art, plus other comic and cartoon expositions throughout the province.

Chapter 5 focuses upon the range of comic publications produced throughout the 1970s and 1980s, with an emphasis on the success of *Croc*, a Québec version of *MAD*. Falardeau documents the extensive marketing of comic books, albums, radio, card games, then provides brief biographies of some of Québec's best known comic and cartoon artists.

The discussion of fanzines in Chapter 6 is inadequate, given the explosion of zine culture in Québec and elsewhere throughout the 1980s and 1990s. A glaring omission is Julie Doucet, a spectacularly successful zine artist with several books and albums to her credit. Chapter 7 is the most "sociological" of the chapters, offering several tables on the availability of comic books in Québec libraries, the number of readers by age, and comparative sales in Québec and France of popular titles such as *Astérix*, *Gaston* and *Lucky Luke*. These statistics are, however, mechanistic in their application, floating somewhat indiscriminately in a field of value-laden judgements about comic culture in Québec society.

La Bande dessinée au Québec is a rich guide to historical information on cartoon and early comic art in Québec, but it is merely a guide. We are presented with a parade of names with little information regarding their contribution to the history of a distinct Québec culture. The scope of the book is too broad for this slim volume. It seems more like a catalogue for an exhibition without the illustrations to accompany it. The lack of reproductions, probably the result of a lack of funding, is a serious oversight for a book of this kind. While the tables presented are useful, they seem somewhat superfluous, a quasi-sociological gloss as if the author is unsure of whether her results should be framed as sociology, journalism, or cultural history. Unfortunately the author opts for a smattering of all three. ●

Falardeau, Mira. *La Bande dessinée au Québec*. Montréal: Boréal. 1994. 125 p. index. ISBN 2890525392 pap. $7.00 Canadian.

Syndicated Comic Strips and Artists 1924-1995: The Complete Index

Compiled by Dave Strickler
Reviewed by Robert C. Harvey

Scholarship in any field is hampered at the beginning by the absence of a convenient avenue of access to its basic resource material. To take an elementary example, if we do not know how many novels Jane Austen wrote—and when they were written—we cannot properly assess Austen as a novelist. Once we have a bibliography of her work—even so simple a thing as a listing—serious analysis can begin, and it can lead to conclusions about novels in general as well as Austen's in particular. We can read all of her novels and evaluate them. Knowing when they were written, we can speculate about other writers who might have influenced her and those she might have influenced. We can determine her place in the development of the novel as a narrative form, and we can then say something about that development as a whole, as a continuum, acknowledging her contribution to it. And Austen's contribution to the novel form is likely to loom large (larger, even, than deserved) if we do not know how many novelists preceded her and how many novels had been published before she wrote her first novel.

By the same token, we cannot say much about the achievements of individual cartoonists who worked in newspaper comic strips unless we know something about the context in which they worked. What other comic strips did they see? How much of their work was original and how much (in a notoriously copy-cat medium) was imitation?

In the past decade or so, our deficiency in this department has diminished somewhat. Enterprising publishers have reprinted significant runs of important comic strips in handy volumes. And the centennial of the comic strip in 1995 inspired a handful of historical reviews that give us tantalizing glimpses into the

development of the comic strip form. From Kitchen Sink Press, for instance, we have *The Comic Strip Century*, a massive two-volume compilation by Bill Blackbeard and Dale Crane that provides samples of many strips we had never seen before. And Ron Goulart in *The Funnies: 100 Years of American Comic Strips* supplies a prose discussion in chronological order of scores of comic strips, pointing out various developments in the form as he goes along. Blackbeard and Kitchen Sink Press collaborated again with *The Yellow Kid*, a complete reprinting of Richard F. Outcault's seminal work.

With such resources at their elbows, students and fans of the medium no longer need to spend every waking hour bent over a hot microfilm reader, winding their way laboriously, one page at a time, through antique newspaper issues in search of samples of fugitive comic strips. For serious scholars, however, the drill has not changed much: in-depth historical research will still require dedicated votaries at the altar of the microfilm reader: only by consulting primary sources can accurate history be written and artifacts analyzed.

Ideally, what would assist embryonic scholarship in this field most would be a comprehensive and detailed index to newspaper comic strips. As a finding aid, this bibliogra-

Alfred Andriola's transition strips from *Dan Dunn* to *Kerry Drake*, 1 and 2 October 1943.

SUBSTITUTE STRIP FOR FRIDAY, OCT. 1...
Introducing KERRY DRAKE!
BEGINNING WEDNESDAY, ALFRED ANDRIOLA WILL PRESENT A NEW DETECTIVE STRIP— FEATURING KERRY DRAKE — A KEEN-WITTED, RESOURCEFUL, COTTON-TOPPED PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR WHO IS ATTACHED TO THE STAFF OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY!
WE TAKE YOU NOW TO MR. ANDRIOLA'S STUDIO-
HELLO, FOLKS! I KNOW YOU'RE GOING TO LIKE OUR NEW HERO, KERRY DRAKE— A SLIM, COOL FIGHTER WHO WAGES A CONSTANT WAR AGAINST CRIME!
"...AND THIS IS "FINGERS" NELSON, A HATE-CRAZED STRANGLER WHO SWEARS HE'LL GET EVEN WITH KERRY FOR BRINGING HIM TO JUSTICE!"
SUBSTITUTE STRIP FOR SATURDAY, OCT. 2
Who is Kerry Drake?
ALFRED ANDRIOLA, WHO HAS BEEN DRAWING THE ADVENTURES OF "DAN DUNN", HAS BROUGHT THIS SERIES TO A CLOSE.
BEGINNING MONDAY, HE WILL INTRODUCE A NEW HERO, KERRY DRAKE, THAT DYNAMIC, COTTON-TOPPED ACE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S STAFF...
WE TAKE YOU NOW BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE LEADING CHARACTERS...
IN THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
CONFOUND IT, KERRY! HOW CAN YOU BE SO COOL IN THE FACE OF THOSE THREATS "FINGERS" IS MAKING AGAINST YOU?
IN THE COUNTY JAIL...
"FINGERS" NELSON, WHOSE POWERFUL HANDS HAVE SNUFFED OUT THE LIVES OF THREE WEALTHY WOMEN HOLD-UP VICTIMS!...

phy would present the same data in several listings. It would list all comic strips alphabetically by title, giving starting and terminating dates (month, day, year), names of cartoonists (and where applicable, the dates of their tenures on the strips), syndicate or publisher names, and type of strip (continuity, adventure, domestic drama, joke-a-day) and manner of rendering (realistic, burlesque, big-foot). A second listing of precisely the same material would be in chronological order, the sequence revealing patterns of development. And a third list would give us access to the first by the names of the cartoonists: an alphabetical roll call of all cartoonists would refer the scholar to the first tally by giving the names of all comic strips a given cartoonist produced.

Realistically speaking, however, such a comprehensive index is more likely to be the final product of scholarship in the field than a finding aid at the beginning of scholarly endeavor. If future scholarship follows past practice, individual researchers will pursue their favorite cartoonists or comic strips, assembling information about them which will incidentally supply indexers with data for the comprehensive bibliography. Still, here and there we have glimmers of more ambitious and all-encompassing endeavors. And Dave Strickler is a good example.

His index to syndicated comic strips and cartoonists from 1924 to 1995 is as complete an inventory as is readily available at present. It is not nearly as comprehensive as such an index must be for maximum utility, and it is flawed in various ways, some serious, some just annoying. But it is a beginning, and in the field of cartoon and comic art studies, still in its infancy, beginnings as ambitious as this attempt are valuable and even useful, whatever their limitations

Strickler's index is, essentially, just a systematic compilation of the data that has been presented every year since 1924 in the *Syndicate Directory* produced by *Editor & Publisher*. This annual publication lists all the comic strips available from syndicates at that time and gives the names of the cartoonists "of record" (that is, the names of the ostensible "authors" that appear on the published strips—which is, sometimes, not the name of the actual producer of the strip: Edgar Rice Burroughs, for instance, is credited for *Tarzan*, but neither Harold Foster nor Burne Hogarth, long-time creators of the published feature, are cited).

This information Strickler presents in two listings: an alphabetical list of comic strip titles, and an alphabetical list of the cartoonists. The first list also gives the years that a given title was listed in the *Syndicate Directory* and the names of the cartoonists credited. So, for instance, *Blondie* was listed in the *Directory* from 1930 until the "present" (1995), and the cartoonists credited with producing the feature are Chic Young (whose name appeared in the *Directory* from 1930 through 1972), Jim Raymond (1973-81), Dean Young (1973-present), Mike Gersher (1982-84), and Stan Drake (1985-present).

The names of these cartoonists appear again in the book's second muster. Next to each name are the names of the strips the cartoonist worked on and the years his name appeared next to that strip's listing in the annual *Directory*. So Mike Gersher's name is accompanied by the notation "Blondie (82-84)," indicating that his name appeared on the strip's published credits in the *Directory* for three issues—1982-1984. Ditto Raymond and Dean Young. But Chic Young's entry reveals that he is credited in the *Directory* with other strips: *Dumb Dora* (for which he was listed in the annual from 1924 through 1929), *Family Foursome* (1931-41), and *Colonel Pottersby and the Duchess* (1935-45 and 1947-63). Stan Drake, similarly, is credited with his other work: *The Heart of Juliet Jones* (1953-89) and *Pop Idols* (1979).

While this sort of information is useful in an unimposing sort of way, it is not precise enough to be more than a starting place for scholarly research. The entries for *Blondie* reveal most of the limitations of Strickler's method (limitations he himself is quick to point out in his introduction). The listing of the creators of the feature does not distinguish between artist and writer, where such a distinction applies. Chic Young both wrote and drew the strip for a period, but his son Dean only writes the feature; during Dean Young's tenure as writer, three artists have drawn it—Jim Raymond, Mike Gersher, and Stan Drake.

Moreover, the cartoonist "of record" is not always the actual creator of the strip during a given period. Jim Raymond, who began assisting Chic Young in the 1930s, both wrote and drew *Blondie* for much of Chic Young's life, beginning in 1937 after the death of Young's first-born

AND IN KERRY DRAKE'S OFFICE, SANDY BURNS, HIS SECRETARY, AND "FIRETOP" HIS OFFICE BOY, WAIT FOR "THE CHIEF"!...
MR. DRAKE IS AWFULLY LATE TONIGHT, FIRETOP!
THAT GUY CAN TAKE CARE OF HIMSELF, SANDY! AN' LOOK! YOU CAN CALL HIM KERRY! I KNOW YOU DO IN YOUR DIARY!

son Wayne. (Dagwood and Blondie had just become the parents of "Baby Dumpling," and Young took a long sabbatical from the strip, which he could scarcely face producing with the memory of his own infant son so fresh in his mind. Raymond did the strip single-handedly during this period—and contributed more than just drawing assistance for much of the rest of Chic Young's stint as the cartoonist "of record.") Similarly, Gersher was assisting Raymond with the art chores of the strip for a period prior to his being credited with the work in the *Directory*.

Finally, the listing does not give us either the precise starting date of a strip (month and day as well as year) nor its concluding date because Strickler's source, the *E&P Directory*, does not bother with such information; its function, after all, is to report to editors and publishers what comic strips are available for purchase through syndicates not to create a historical record.

I can certainly understand the difficulty Strickler faced in this enterprise (and, at the same time, admire his energy and dedication and still appreciate the necessity of his imposing on the task the strictly bibliographic rule of thumb that he employs), but users of the listing must be keenly aware of the limitation inherent in using the issue year of the *Directory* to suggest the running dates of the features. Mort Walker's *Beetle Bailey*, for example, is cited first in the 1951 issue of the *Directory*; but the strip began 3 September 1950. If we take the *Directory* date as the actual debut year, we miss the boat by several furlongs.

As a source of such information, the *Directory's* usefulness is further compromised by its having skipped publication in 1943 and 1944. Any strip that started or stopped in those years drops off the planet. And Alfred Andriola's career is a provocative case in point. Strickler's entry for Andriola credits him with *Charlie Chan* from 1938 to 1941 and *Kerry Drake* from 1946 to 1982. From this, we are forced to conclude that Andriola was not working as a cartoonist from 1942 through 1945. Not so. In fact, he was producing a strip called *Dan Dunn*. Strickler credits *Dan Dunn* to Norman Marsh, who, indeed, launched the strip in 1933 as the Publishers Syndicate imitation of *Dick Tracy*. But Marsh left the strip abruptly in 1941: an ex-Marine, he precipitously re-enlisted to fight the Japanese right after Pearl Harbor was attacked in early December. Allen Saunders, who was writing two strips for Publishers at the time (*Steve Roper* and *Mary Worth*), was asked to step in and write *Dan Dunn*. To draw the strip, Publishers recruited Andriola (who was at loose ends after having given up *Charlie Chan*). The syndicate promised Andriola that if he would do *Dan Dunn* for awhile, they would eventually give him a strip of his own.

About eighteen months later, Publishers evidently felt it had fulfilled enough of the *Dan Dunn* obligations to client papers. Andriola was permitted to introduce his new strip, *Kerry Drake*, as if it were the final installments of *Dan Dunn*. So on Friday and Saturday, 1 and 2 October 1943, Andriola drew panels in the spaces of *Dan Dunn* advertising his new strip, which, he said, would begin on Monday, 4 October. And it did.

By this adroit maneuver, Andriola inherited all of *Dan Dunn's* papers for his own creation. But he also inherited *Dan Dunn's* writer, Allen Saunders, who apparently had a binding contract with Publishers (not to mention the negotiating clout he had as writer of two of the syndicate's other strips). In the deal subsequently struck, Saunders would write *Kerry Drake* but only Andriola's signature would appear on the strip. (Incidentally, Saunders retails a slightly different variation on *Kerry Drake's* creation: *Drake* was invented quite deliberately as a substitute for *Dan Dunn*, he says, in order to prevent Norman Marsh from reclaiming his "abandoned property" at some future time.) Much of this activity would have been reflected in the *E&P Directory*, we assume, had the *Directory* been published in 1943 and 1944, when *Dan Dunn* ceased and *Kerry Drake* began. Why the 1945 edition of the *Directory* does not (apparently) list *Kerry Drake* is another difficulty, and one for which I have no explanation.

The *Directory* is fallible on yet another score. If a strip did not last long, it is not on the list. I suspect that is the case with Dr. Seuss's *Hejji*. Ironically, Strickler drew my attention to this situation himself. In his introduction, he says (tongue in cheek) that one of the uses of the index is to "settle bets over beer on whether Ring Lardner or Dr. Seuss ever wrote newspaper comics." Both did. But Dr. Seuss's *Hejji* is not listed in Strickler's index—probably because the strip, an exotic Sunday series set in some Arabian locale with magic carpets and the like, ran only a few months in William Randolph Hearst's papers in the spring of 1935. Although syndicated by King Features, it presumably did not last long enough to get listed in the *Directory*. But Dr. Seuss did produce a newspaper strip, so whichever barfly bet against that and won the wager by finding support in Strickler's index will eventually have to return his ill-gotten gain. Ring Lardner also produced a comic strip: he wrote *You Know Me Al*, a strip based upon his essays of the same name about a bush league baseball player. And Lardner is listed in the index.

Strickler's method is also prone to fall into quite another pit. Just because a strip is listed in the *Directory*, it does not mean that strip ever actually appeared. If no newspapers bought a strip in its inaugural year, then did the strip really exist? (If a tree falls in a completely deserted forest, does it make a sound?) Any strip listed in the *Directory* for only one issue, then, is suspect. This last pitfall is dramatized by the entries associated with Charles Schulz. In the 1950 *Directory*, he is credited with a strip called *Li'l Folk*, but this strip never appeared under that name. That was Schulz's name for the strip that his syndicate subsequently renamed and issued as *Peanuts*. The

Hejji by Dr. Seuss, 7 April 1935. Reprinted by permission of King Features Syndicate.

Hejji

By Dr. Seuss

BEYOND JAGGED PEAKS LIES THE **LAND** OF **BAAKO** HIDDEN - UNKNOWN. SHUT OFF FROM OUR WORLD BY MOUNTAINS SO HIGH THAT MOST BIRDS CANNOT FLY THEM. ONLY THE BAAKINESE EAGLE CAN SOAR SO HIGH. HE HAS TO TAXI OTHERS ACROSS!

NATURE HAS STRANGE WAYS IN THE MOUNTAINS OF **BAAKO**. IN LAKES ON OLD VOLCANO TOPS, WHALES SPLASH AND SPOUT... 10,000 LEAGUES FROM THE NEAREST SEA!

INTO THIS LAND COMES **HEJJI** A STRANGER

WHAT A COUNTRY! TURTLES THAT GALLOP!

WHEW! TWO GOATS THAT WEAR **ONE** BEARD BETWEEN THEM!

AND **HERE'S** SOME STUNT, A FLOWER **BROADCASTING MUSIC**

BY THE MOON'S RIB! HE'S PLUCK'D THE **TRUMPET FLOWER** OF **BAAKO**!

SEIZE HIM!

WE'LL DRAGGLE HIM BEFORE THE **MIGHTY ONE**!

THE **MIGHTY ONE** HAS PROMISED THAT FLOWER TO HIS **FAIR ONE**!

SHUT UP, YOU NOISY VEGETABLE! YOU'VE GOT ME INTO A **FINE MESS**!

IT WILL GO HARD WITH THIS YOUNG FOREIGN FOOL!

HARD INDEED! THE **MIGHTY ONE** IS IN A **DARK, DARK** MOOD!

WHAT FATE AWAITS **HEJJI** BEYOND THESE TOWERING GATES OF **BAAKO**!

© 1937, Dr. Seuss Renewed 1965, Dr. Seuss All rights reserved

strip actually debuted on 2 October 1950, and Strickler's index cites it from its first *Directory* appearance under its new name—in 1951.

Entries of this sort reveal the most serious flaw in the index, the absence of knowledgeable editing. Strickler, for all his undeniable dedication, does not seem particularly informed about his subject. He tells us that he was inspired to compile this index by his frustration as a reference librarian at the lack of useful reference material on comic strips. He was given an additional nudge by the imperative to publish or perish that is imposed upon all laborers in the collegiate vineyards. But neither motive nor his other career experiences in hotel management, entertainment coordination for Disney World, or professional gambling furnish him with any detailed knowledge about the history of comic strips.

Were he even somewhat familiar with the field, he would know that the Jim Davis who this listing credits with *Garfield* is not (as the listing asserts) the same Jim Davis who produced *The Fox and the Crow* in the 1950s. (And since *The Fox and the Crow* was listed only once—in the 1950 *Directory*—I am tempted to suppose that a newspaper strip based upon the popular DC comic book with that title did not, actually, ever appear in the funnies sections of any newspaper. But I cannot say for sure.) Similarly, I suspect that the Walt Scott credited with *Dramatic Events in Bible History* in 1927 is not the same Walt Scott credited with *Little People* 1952-69 and *Huckleberry Hollow* 1968-69, the implications of the single Walt Scott entry in the artist index to the contrary notwithstanding.

As a trained librarian, Strickler says he followed the profession's practice of assuming that a change in a strip's title signals a different work. That might be the case with Don Flowers' *Diana Dane* (cited 1931-32) and *Oh, Diana!* by the same cartoonist (1933-53)—although I suspect the latter was merely a refinement of the former. But Flowers' *Glamor Girls* panel, cited in 1945 and then from 1947 through 1967, is surely the same feature as his *Glamour Girls*, cited only in 1946. Rigid cataloging practices, useful as they undeniably are, apparently cannot comprehend alternate spellings for what they are.

Elsewhere, name changes brush by history willy-nilly. Roy Crane's *Wash Tubbs* appears in three separate entries: *Washington Tubbs* in the 1925 *Directory*, *Washington Tubbs II* 1926-27, and *Wash Tubbs* 1928-49. Meanwhile, Crane's *Captain Easy* is cited from 1933 until 1987. Canny students of the medium know that Crane changed the name of the strip in its Sunday incarnation from *Wash Tubbs* to *Captain Easy: Soldier of Fortune* in 1933; we must assume, then, that the daily version did not adopt this name change until at least 1950, the year of the *Directory* in which this title first appears.

The daily strip actually adopted the new name on 19 September 1949, if we are to take as authoritative the only other index of this sort in existence. Strickler is aware that Paul Leiffer and Hames Ware did a similar compilation of the *Editor & Publisher Syndicate Directory* which was published in installments in various issues of the weekly newspaper *The Comics Buyer's Guide* from April 1984 until August 1986. Leiffer and Ware, longtime students of the history of comics, supplemented the *Directory* listings by adding information from other sources. Under the *Wash Tubbs* entry, for instance, they note the name change and the date of that change. They also give the actual starting date of the strip (21 April 1924). In many other instances, they supply both starting and concluding dates by month and day as well as year. They also provide the name of the syndicate; Strickler does not, thereby closing an avenue of research that would otherwise be open to the researcher who seeks the actual starting date of a given strip.

Leiffer and Ware retrofitted the *Directory* data into a single chronological listing much like the second listing in my ideal index. Their index is alphabetical, but each alphabetical section is subdivided into years—and then runs all strips cited in a given year in alphabetical order. So the "B" listing, for instance, starts with 1900 and a strip called *Buddy Tucker*. The last issue of the *Directory* included in their index is 1983.

Although the Leiffer-Ware compilation is in some respects superior to Strickler's (even though it does not mention Ring Lardner's strip), it is not available to anyone who did not clip and save the newspaper installments in which it made its only appearance. It has not been published except in those scattered issues of *CBG* over a two-year span. Strickler's book is at least obtainable (from the publisher, Comics Access, 1071 Main Street, Box X-9, Cambria, CA 93428, if not from a neighborhood bookstore). Moreover, Strickler includes in his version of the compilation data from the 1995 *Directory*, thereby making the index more current. His index lacks the kind of fine tuning that Leiffer and Ware achieved by using sources other than the *E&P Directory*, but he has added a very useful list of pseudonyms. (I suppose I should have known that Abner Dean was the pen name for Abner Epstein, but I did not—until browsing through Strickler's list.)

Strickler scrupulously lists the cartoon-like features that his index deliberately leaves out—editorial cartoons, weather cartoons, how-to strips, cartoons that illustrate homilies (although he includes *Love Is . . .*), cutouts and paper dolls, and "narrow subject specialties without distinctive names (e.g., *Business Cartoon*), and "generic named items without well-known personnel" (he might, he says, include *Goldberg Cartoon* but not *Nameless Cartoons* by Carlisle). Despite this last proviso, he includes several "Humorous Cartoon" entries, each by a different cartoonist. He also leaves out seasonal strips, and that's too bad. We could use a list of the strips and cartoonists who used to enhance the Yuletide with a four- to six-week Christmas story.

Despite the shortcomings I have noted here, Strickler's project is largely successful, given the bibliographic protocols he has imposed upon it. But the most impressive fact about his index is, as he points out, that it is "a work in progress." He fully intends to continue the project, adding to it. I would hope that he would add specific starting and concluding dates, for

instance; and then maybe some codification to indicate the type of strip and the manner of its visualization.

But the richest vein for Strickler to mine is the period before 1924. His index at present includes about 4,500 strip titles, he says. That's just a little over half of what is probably out there. Gordon Campbell, a comics historian in Nashville, Tennessee, told me that he had file cards on over 7,500 comic strips. Most of the three thousand difference presumably consists of short-run features produced in the early decades of this century. Cartoonists were anchored in the art departments of big city papers then, and they often produced comic strips that were, in effect, one-joke efforts. They would run for only a few weeks before the joke was exhausted.

If this sort of information is added to the data with regularity, Strickler may well have on his hands the kind of publication that can be issued every year with new information in much the same fashion as Robert Overstreet's *Comic Book Price Guide*. And then the inchoate field of scholarship in cartooning and comic arts will have a handmaiden of immense value. ●

Syndicated Comic Strips and Artists 1924-1995: The Complete Index. Dave Strickler, compiler. Cambria, California: Comics Access. 1995. xii 219p. $16.95 + $2.00 shipping. (This title may be ordered from the compiler at 653 Shell Beach Rd., Shell Beach, CA 93449.

The Art of George du Maurier

By Richard Kelly
Reviewed by Kerry Soper

The Art of George du Maurier is the first high quality collection of this largely ignored nineteenth century English satirist's work to be published. A companion volume to Richard Kelly's excellent study of the artist's fiction writing (*George du Maurier*, Boston: Twayne, 1983), this book is designed primarily as a showcase of du Maurier's satirical drawings from *Punch*. The book's greatest strength is the number and quality of these illustrations: 204 pages of oversized, carefully reproduced woodcuts, paintings, and sketches. The binding, paper, and elegant layout are exceptional, too, allowing the reader to see clearly the artist's highly detailed draftsmanship, and to understand better how these drawings were originally received by readers of *Punch*.

In the opening pages, two short chapters lifted directly from Kelly's earlier work provide biographical information on du Maurier and sketch out helpful historical and cultural contexts for understanding the art. Highlights of the biographical information include a harrowing account of how the artist lost his sight in one eye at a young age and how this affected his work: the "duality" of the artist's disposition and outlook after being raised on both French and English soil; and an analysis of the roots of du Maurier's conservatism and how it determined the flavor of his gentle satirizing of aristocratic life and prompted his more scathing attacks on the Aesthetic movement in England during the 1870s.
Immediately following these chapters is a brief essay by du Maurier which originally appeared in *Punch*. Never before reprinted, "Social Pictorial Satire" is not only a thoughtful reflection on the purposes and uses of satire and popular art, but also a fascinating bit of self-analysis that reveals what is perhaps true of most great visual satirists: they are capable of, and given to, clever self-deprecation, but also possess large egos, and have a great need to have their importance and popularity affirmed. Du Maurier devotes a great deal of effort in explaining and justifying the narrowness of his satiric scope—the foibles of the upper-class—and then celebrates the role of an ideal social satirist that, although hypothetical, just happens to resemble closely himself.

Du Maurier's works, reprinted chronologically in this book, can be divided into several different categories which include cute vignettes of the wit and wisdom children, a few condescending portraits of working-class life, pointed attacks on the pretensions of the Aesthetic movement, benign jests at the fashions and ideals of the British upper class in the nineteenth century, and more biting satirical prods at the hypocrisies and pompousness of nouveau riche social strivers. Although well executed, du Maurier's comical presentation of the malapropisms of childhood may strike the present day reader as overly sentimental and cloying. Du Maurier's idealized, tall, aristocratic women, similar to the "beauties" of the genteel American satirists Charles Dana Gibson and James Montgomery Flagg, also seem to undermine the effectiveness of his satirical commentary. The idealized visual content (virtual fashion plates in many cases) often negates any subversive verbal message. Moreover, du Maurier's manner of talking about these pieces is slightly grating to the reader who has a taste for sharper satire, and reveals in the author an essentially conservative satirical tack that leans more towards congratulating "right-thinking," and idealized norms, than the Rabelasian inversions and anti-elite/ bourgeois grotesques so common to much twentieth century American cartoon satire:

"Sam Weller, if you recollect, was fond of 'pootiness and wirtue.' I *so* agree with him! I adore them both, especially in women and children. I only wish that wirtue was as easy to draw as pootiness . . . But indeed for me—speaking as an artist, and also perhaps a little bit as a man—pootiness is almost a wirtue in itself. I don't think I shall ever weary of trying to depict it . . ." (33).

Du Maurier's occasional condescending portraits of "low types," and consistent ridiculing of the nouveau

1886.

THE NEW VERB.

BANJO, BANJAS, BANJAT—BANJAMUS, BANJATIS, BANJANT!

Punch, 17 April 1886

riche reveals that he was an elitist and aristocrat at heart. Despite this reactionary and self-congratulatory stance, much of his work was highly effective at gently, but forcefully dissecting the pretensions and hypocrisies of numerous society types including the foppish painter or poet, the naive newlyweds, and the venerable colonels and matrons of English country life. Indeed, the bulk of the pieces in this volume reveal du Maurier's gift for brilliantly subtle irony, effective visual and verbal understatement, and convincing, colorful dialogue. His best work resembles the prose satire of Dickens, Thackery, James; and in both spirit and outlook he seems to be a kindred spirit to the present day artist/prose satirist Tom Wolfe. And although du Maurier was not given to comical exaggeration and had a highly austere, illustrative style that only rarely revealed a flair for inspired caricature, the pacing and structure of the complex and extensive verbal elements that accompanied each image reveal some surprising similarities between his work and the verbal structure of American comic strips.

Despite separations of culture, time, and sensibility, du Maurier's draftsmanship is a treat for the eye, and much of his satiric work remains effective at prodding timeless foibles of human nature. Kelly's work as an archivist and biographer of du Maurier's art and fiction in this book, as well as his previous volume, offers valuable access to an under-appreciated artist's work. Access may be restricted to library-browsing for most readers, however, considering the $99.95 price tag—a sum too steep for most comics scholars and fans. There have been other works dedicated to his art and life including T. Martin Wood's 1913 biography *George du Maurier*, a 1947 analysis of his book illustrations titled *George du Maurier: His Life and Work* by Derek Pepys Whiteley; memoirs by his famous daughter Daphne du Maurier; and brief passages in histories of *Punch*. Kelly's work stands as the most thorough analysis, cataloguing, and presentation of this satirist's art and writing, and the best weaving together of influences, politics, contexts, and biography in an effort to understand fully du Maurier's fascinating life and work. ●

Kelly, Richard. *The Art of George du Maurier*. Scolar Press. 1996. 243 pages. index. bibliography. ISBN 0-85967-977-2 hdb. $99.95

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Basic endnote style is as follows:

1. Rebecca Zurier, *Art for The Masses* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 89. [Note that no abbreviation precedes the page numbers.]

2. Alice Sheppard, "There Were Ladies Present: American Women Cartoonists and Comic Artists in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of American Culture* 7 (Fall 1984): 38-48.

3. Bill Blackbeard and Martin WIlliams, eds. *The Smithsonian Collection of Newspaper Comics* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977), 12.

4. George Newton Gordon, "Can Children Corrupt Our Comics?" in *The Funnies: An American Idiom* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), 158-166.

5. Edwin McDowell. "America Is Taking Comic Books Seriously," *New York Times*, 31 July 1988, E8.

Style for second references:

1. Zurier, *Art for the Masses*, 66.

2. Sheppard, "There Were Ladies Present," 44.

3. Gordon, "Can Children Corrupt Our Comics?" 164.

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